

A
MINOR PICKET
MAY BE SMALL
BUT NEXT
TO A SCAB
I'M TEN FEET
TALL

weekly worker



A battle which was inevitable: understanding the 1984-85 miners' Great Strike. David Douglass of the NUM puts the record straight

- SWP volte face
- CPGB aggregate
- US media and Iran
- Internet censorship

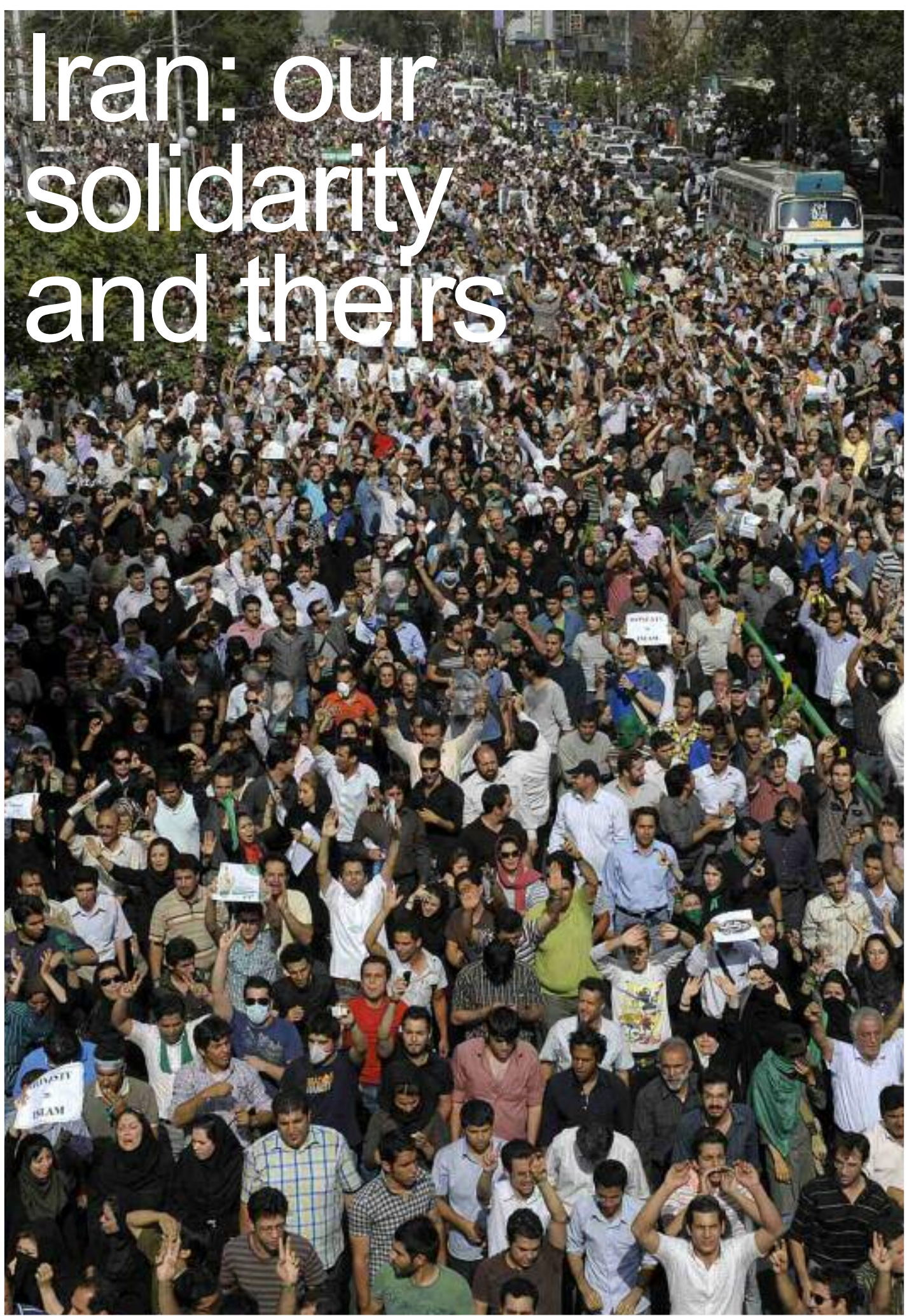
No 777 Thursday July 9 2009

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

www.cpgb.org.uk

£1/€1.10

Iran: our solidarity and theirs



LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

Bolshevik tactics

In recent weeks we have had an exchange with James Turley in the *Weekly Worker* on the subject of Lenin's attitude toward voting for bourgeois parties. In a previous discussion with the CPGB, in which the same issue was raised, we wrote:

"The most interesting political point raised in comrade [Mike] Macnair's contribution is his reference to Lenin's 1920 assertion in *'Leftwing' communism: an infantile disorder* that the Bolsheviks had been correct to vote for the bourgeois Cadets in the second round of elections to the tsarist duma. Macnair appears agnostic on the issue, commenting only that 'Lenin may have been wrong' on this point. We think Lenin was indeed mistaken to pose this as a model for the fledgling Comintern, and note that voting for the Cadets stands in contradiction to the policy outlined in his famous *April theses*, the document that laid the political basis for the victory of the October Revolution" (*Weekly Worker* May 19 2005).

In his letter of June 4 2009, comrade Turley cited the Bolsheviks' electoral support to the Cadet party as evidence that "there is no class character that automatically precludes Marxists from giving support to a political formation". We replied: "Because they conceived of the tasks of the Russian Revolution as essentially bourgeois-democratic, the pre-1917 Bolsheviks were prepared to discuss the idea of electoral agreements with what they described as the 'revolutionary bourgeoisie'; that is, 'only with parties which are fighting for a republic and which recognise the necessity of an armed uprising' ('Blocs with the Cadets', November 1906). This category did not include the Cadets, as Lenin made clear in his November 1906 'Draft election address'" (June 11).

In his reply, comrade Turley quoted Lenin's comment in *'Leftwing' communism* that "the entire history of Bolshevism, both before and after the October Revolution, is full of instances of changes of tack, conciliatory tactics and compromises with other parties, including bourgeois parties!" This is, of course, quite true, and we have often participated in united actions with various bourgeois formations to defend abortion rights, to win equality for gays and lesbians, to stop fascist mobilisations, etc.

But the nub of our difference is the CPGB's insistence that it is perfectly principled for communists to vote for cross-class formations or outright bourgeois parties. Turley charged that we were "spinning a yarn" to suggest that Lenin saw voting for the Cadets as unprincipled:

"On the question of a deal with the Cadets, what Lenin opposed in 1906 was a *strategic alliance*, as proposed by the Mensheviks. But [the IBT's Barbara] Dorn neglects to mention that the Bolsheviks did strike a *tactical* deal with the Cadets in the duma elections, which resulted in the Bolsheviks winning all six seats in the workers' curia. And, of course, Lenin referred to this approvingly in *'Leftwing' communism*" (June 18).

It is true that the Bolsheviks were prepared to make deals involving support to Cadet candidates during some stages of the convoluted tsarist electoral process. It is also true that Lenin retrospectively endorsed this policy in *'Leftwing' communism*, his famous 1920 polemic against those who rejected the idea of any and all 'compromises'.

The Bolsheviks' willingness to "support the bourgeoisie against tsarism (for instance, during second rounds of

elections, or during second ballots)" derived from their presumption that tsarism would be overthrown by a bourgeois-democratic revolution. Their policy was also shaped by the necessity to manoeuvre within the framework of a grossly undemocratic, multi-tiered, indirect electoral system where voters were assigned to different 'curia'.

The resolution on election tactics adopted at the Menshevik-dominated RSDLP Tammerfors conference in November 1906 stated: "During the first stage of the elections in the workers' curia, absolutely no partial or local agreements are permitted with groups or parties which do not adhere to the viewpoint of the proletarian class struggle. In all other curiae, if during the course of the election campaign there appears to be a danger that the lists of the rightwing parties will win, local agreements are permitted with revolutionary and democratic opposition parties ... The forms of such agreements must correspond to the local conditions and may involve either a territorial distribution of candidacies within a single electoral district or the composition of joint lists of elector candidates" (*Resolutions and decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* Vol 1). A similar policy was agreed to at the July 1907 conference in Kotka. At the Bolshevik-dominated Prague conference in January 1912, the same policy was endorsed for the elections to the fourth duma:

These narrow, "technical" agreements were further restricted in the big cities where, "because of the clear absence of any Black Hundred threat, agreements are allowable only with democratic groups against liberal": ie, with Socialist Revolutionaries and other Trudoviks against Cadets.

Max Shachtman, the pre-eminent American renegade from Trotskyism who ended up backing counterrevolution, cited Bolshevik support to Cadet candidates to justify his shift toward voting for the 'lesser evil' Democratic Party imperialists (see *New International* fall 1957). Various other revisionists have used the same argument over the years, and it is abundantly clear that the CPGB leadership considers it a licence to cross the class line.

But such comparisons are entirely illegitimate, because this tactic was conditioned by the anomalous situation the Bolsheviks found themselves in: as the socialist leadership of the most militant sections of the proletariat in a semi-feudal society that they were convinced had to undergo both a bourgeois revolution and a period of capitalist development before a socialist transformation was on the historical agenda.

In Britain, where the bourgeois-democratic revolution had occurred hundreds of years earlier, Lenin recommended that the fledgling communist movement attempt to form a united front with Labour against the capitalist parties. Lenin suggested that if the Labour Party rejected this offer, it would provide the communists with an opportunity to expose it as an agency of the capitalists.

For revolutionaries, offering political support to capitalist formations is a matter of principle, not 'tactics'. The CPGB's attempt to defend a policy of electoral class-collaborationism by hiding behind the "purely technical" arrangements the Bolsheviks were forced to make to get around the obstacles created by the tsarist autocracy is unworthy of any militant with an ounce of revolutionary integrity.

As Lenin stated, "Many sophists ... reason exactly in the same way as the British leaders of opportunism ... 'If the Bolsheviks are permitted a certain compromise, why should we not be permitted any kind of compromise?' ... Every proletarian ... sees the difference between a compromise enforced

by objective conditions (such as lack of strike funds, no outside support, starvation and exhaustion) - a compromise which in no way minimises the revolutionary devotion and readiness to carry on the struggle on the part of the workers who have agreed to such a compromise - and, on the other hand, a compromise by traitors who try to ascribe to objective causes their self-interest ..." (*'Leftwing' communism*).

'Communists' who are prepared to give electoral support - however 'critical' - to bourgeois parties do not stand on the legacy of Lenin and Trotsky, the leaders of the October Revolution, but rather embrace the policy of Kerensky and the Mensheviks.

Barbara Dorn
International Bolshevik Tendency

Just resolution

Yossi Schwartz claims that, although Israel has existed for more than 60 years, still the Israeli Jews do not have an Israeli national consciousness, but rather a "mystical Zionist dogma claiming that the Israeli Jews are part of a mysterious Jewish world nation" (Letters, June 18). He then announces that as socialists we cannot support the right to self-determination for what he describes as "an imperialist population".

But in what sense can an entire population be described as imperialist? Ethnicity and nation are all about self-ascription - if a given group of people wish to designate themselves as an ethnic group (based on language, culture, religion or claims to a mythical shared history), then it is their democratic right to do so, whether it makes sense to us or not. If they then wish to build a political apparatus based on that ethnicity, and thus become a 'nation', it is also their right to do so - even if we may disagree and argue against such a move.

It was Lenin, after all, who endorsed the Second International's "absolutely direct, unequivocal recognition of the full right of all nations to self-determination; on the other hand, the equally unambiguous appeal to the workers for international unity in their class struggle" (*The right of nations to self-determination*). Thus, we should support the political rights of all national groups on the condition that we also support international class solidarity between those groups.

The same applies to the situation in Israel-Palestine. The late Maxime Rodinson had a more sophisticated take on the conflict than most contemporary Marxist commentators. Rodinson argued that, yes, the foundation of Israel was a tragedy in the sense that it rested on the self-determination of one nation being granted violently at the expense of another; but, nevertheless, the Israeli-Jewish nation now existed and its right to do so must be defended.

I do not believe that all young people in Israel today are in the thrall of a "mystical Zionist dogma". Israeli national consciousness exists, but contains many strands, some of them secular, democratic, anti-militarist and socialist.

Many are recognising the formation of Israel for what it was - a brutal, colonial enterprise by their national ancestors for which they are being made to pay. They support the right of Palestinians to a nation-state if they so desire, and the same right should be afforded them in return. Only by supporting each other's legitimate national rights will a just resolution be achieved.

David Bates
Middlesbrough

Zeroing in

Comrades Tony Greenstein and Yossi Schwartz reply (Letters, July 2) to my previous letters and articles at tedious

length, which serves to obfuscate the main issue.

It is really quite simple: what my Matzpen comrades and I have been advocating consistently for many years is equality of national rights between the Palestinian Arabs and the Hebrews (so-called Israeli Jews). Almost needless to say, this presupposes the overthrow of Zionism.

What these two comrades advocate boils down to national inequality. The snag is that without the credible assurance of national equality, there is zero likelihood of overthrowing Zionism.

Moshé Machover
email

Moralistic

Does Tony Greenstein ever think before pressing fingers to keyboard? The comrade's last letter concludes with the truly illogical assertion that the "starting point" for socialists is that "oppressor nations" - like the Hebrew or Israeli Jewish people - "do not have a right to self-determination".

No, no, no. Seeing how the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, etc already freely exercise their "right to self-determination" - and no doubt are all "oppressor nations" as far as the comrade is concerned - is Tony proposing that they now be *denied* their right to self-determination? If so, could the comrade please enlighten us as to the process by which the USA or UK, for example, are going to be stripped of their 'nationhood' or 'demoted'?

As Tony singularly fails to understand - and at least in this he has been consistent over the years - communist support for the right to self-determination is fundamentally a demand for the *equality* of nations and peoples. It is not, as appears to be the case for the comrade, a moralistic bestowal upon those nations or peoples which happen at the time to be in his 'approved' list.

Eddie Ford
email

Peaceful

What kind of communist is Tony Clarke? He would happily import anything from Stalin's Soviet Union, but incorporating democratic demands from American revolutionary experience is beyond the pale (Letters, July 2). All because of British exceptionalism and his very British Stalinist, chauvinistic hatred of everything American.

Actually all European parties in the Second and Third Internationals before the rise of Stalin demanded the right to bear arms, whether they were in a position to implement the demand or not, including even Bernstein. No exceptionalism there.

The truth is, comrade Clarke is hoping for a revolution so peaceful that the working class need play no role whatsoever. I quote: "The peak oil economic crisis, which is unfolding, raises the possibility that, at a certain stage, the bourgeois state may be used as an instrument of reform to introduce socialism."

Socialism is the rule of the working class, which requires the overthrow and destruction of the bourgeois state. Not a series of economic measures that can be implemented by the British bourgeoisie. Surely that would be the continuation of those bourgeois rights that he hypocritically pillories.

Phil Kent
Haringey

Perilous

In his short letter concerning the introduction of gun control laws in this country at the beginning of the last century, my comrade Ted Crawford points out that these laws were enacted

in order to disarm the working classes of this country at a time of heightened class struggle (July 2). I doubt very much that this was directly related to the revolution in Russia, however.

Rather, I would suggest that what concerned our lords and masters was the example of the frustrated revolution in Ireland - an event that excited many of the revolutionaries of the day. Indeed, we are aware that the small Socialist Labour Party had collaborated with Irish revolutionaries in a number of ways. This collaboration went so far as to include the smuggling of arms to the national liberation struggle in Ireland, although evidence for this is scarce, due to the secrecy imposed by the very nature of the work undertaken.

Let us not forget that, at the time of these laws, the boss-class was more than willing to threaten a militant workers' struggle with suppression by their armed forces. This is a situation unlikely to be repeated in the near future, I regret to say. Given the bloodthirsty nature of the British ruling class, however, it is forgotten at our peril.

Mike Pearn
email

Class action

Yassamine Mather writes of the recent demonstrations in Iran: "Those of us who can identify the class composition of demonstrators from their clothes and accents have not had the slightest doubt about the predominance of workers and wage-earners" ('Beginning of the end', June 25).

How pathetic to sit and study the composition of the clothes and accents for the sake of this obsession of non-working class intellectuals who decide whether something is good or bad according to whether it is working class or not. Humanity should be the first and foremost consideration, not whether the protesters and the victims are working class!

Potkin Azarmehr
<http://azarmehr.blogspot.com>

Falsification

I should like to raise some issues that have occurred to me while reading articles in papers like the *Weekly Worker* and hearing the declarations of my western comrades concerning the ideology of the international workers' movement of our times.

I have lived in Hungary - one of the countries that had socialism - so I have been able to follow and see with my own eyes the theoretical developments and changes in the Communist Party of my homeland and (partly) of its fraternal countries too.

Why do you unceasingly affirm that what was presented and taught in the countries of this region as Marxism was actually a 'bastardised', false kind of Marxism? Would you kindly prove this very grave and provocative affirmation and provide some concrete examples where this so-called falseness is unambiguously demonstrable?

Stalin is mentioned only as this incorporated devil and 'Stalinism' (a favoured cliché of bourgeois propaganda) is therefore nothing other than something to curse. Don't you realise that, by repeating these clichés of our class enemies, you are actually backing their fight against us and against the international movement of workers?

Petik Janos
Hungary

Ignored

In response to Mike Belbin's article ('Evolution's revolution', July 2), why has the work of Chris Knight and his associates been ignored?

Cliff Slaughter
email

SWP

Unremarkable volte-face



Alex Callinicos: snide swipe at Hopi

The SWP has raised more than a few eyebrows on the left with its coverage of the recent protests in Iran.

Allies, opponents and even some members (the editors of the infamous *Lenin's Tomb* blog, for example) expected either grim silence or tacit backing for the supposed victor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Yet it was not so - "People power rocks Iran," screamed the front page of *Socialist Worker* (June 20), atop an article full of the kind of gushing enthusiasm usually reserved for stale anti-BNP protests whose success the SWP is desperately trying to talk up.

The session at last weekend's Marxism 2009 school, however, made the switcheroo look rather more (depressingly) mundane. Speaking to the title 'Iran in revolt - the possibility for change', Peyman Jafari - Iranian exile and member of the SWP's International Socialist Tendency in Holland - outlined its analysis of the situation. Much of this was uncontroversial - simmering tensions and a peculiarly fraught election campaign had led to serious doubts over the legitimacy of the results, and this had become the flashpoint for popular discontent in Iran.

Nevertheless, he seemed under the impression that the *entire* purpose of the protests was to get the elections annulled. And, as his speech drew on, all indicators were that he was perfectly comfortable with the view of the protests as basically pro-Moussavi, and loyal to the ideals of the 1979 revolution (by which, in turn, he meant its Islamic factors).

It was not our job to tell the Iranian masses what to do - instead we must be the "best fighters" for their demands. We should have "no illusions" in Moussavi, though precisely what the point of having no illusions is when we are forbidden from dispelling illusions is left to comrades' imaginations.

In any case, it is plain that Jafari *does* have illusions in Moussavi - he painted him as a link to a kind of welfare-statist heritage of the 1980s, rather than mentioning his rather more troubling history as a mass butcher of Iranian communists during his tenure as prime minister in that decade (which put him, in practical terms, second only to supreme leader Khomeini).

Stuart King of Hands Off the People of Iran and Permanent Revolution craftily managed to get himself to the head of the queue for floor speakers, and

questioned how it would be possible to get more sections of the working class on board the movement - surely it was necessary to raise socialist demands?

The rest of the 'debate' consisted mostly of SWP members criticising Hopi, generally on spurious grounds. A brief bit of colour was provided by a non-SWP comrade, who argued a neo-Stalinist defence of Ahmadinejad and opposed the protests. Alex Callinicos, the SWP's leading thinker, spoke next and criticised very sharply the failure of the previous speaker to 'pick the right side', and his intervention was generally agreeable for that. He made a snide swipe at Hopi for insisting the regime was 'completely' dictatorial (not true), and argued against producing "a programme from our back pocket" (the SWP generally doesn't overburden even its back pockets in this respect, anyway).

Another SWP speaker criticised Hopi for "imposing" slogans such as "*Marg bar Ahmadinejad*", "*Marg bar Khamenei*" and "*Marg bar Mousavi*" ('Death to Ahmadinejad', etc). The first two are slogans from the student movement; the last we have not reported or used at all. That *SW* front page article, meanwhile, was quite

happy to cry, "*Marg bar diktator*".

To propose slogans and so forth is simple "patronising", apparently - a characterisation which, to be frank, beggars belief. Hopi is in regular contact with militant workers, students and leftists in Iran. They are not troglodytes, and read the international press - including the left press - voraciously. If these militants, who have made '*Marg bar ...*' the best known bit of Farsi on the Anglophone left, read the SWP effectively saying that Moussavi is the leader they deserve, and they read the *Weekly Worker* and other left organs calling for the regime's overthrow, general strikes and such, which are they *truly* likely to consider 'patronising', comrades?

In reality, of course, the SWP is perfectly happy to impose strategies (if that is even the right word) on the Iranian working class. It has all but told them to subordinate their activity to the *right* wing of the protest movements, and declared itself the 'best fighters' for a bourgeois candidate with a well known and deplorable history, to say the least. An improvement in some respects on open apologetics, but not a substitute for principled internationalism ●

Jim Grant



A week of debate and controversy

Venue: Raymont Hall, 63 Wickham Road, London SE4.

Reserve your place now:
office@cpgb.org.uk; 07950 416922

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: Sundays, 5pm. Study topic, plus weekly political report from Provisional Central Committee. Ring 07950 416922 for details.

July 12: August H Nimtz Jr *Marx, Tocqueville and race in America*. Subject: 'Explaining the civil war: the new struggle in the press'.

July 19: August H Nimtz Jr *Marx, Tocqueville and race in America*. Subject: 'Explaining the civil war: from a constitutional to a revolutionary war'.

South Wales: Call Bob for details: 07816 480679.

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday, we upload a podcast of commentary on the current political situation. In addition, the site will feature voice files of public meetings and other events.

http://cpgb.podbean.com.

Communist Students meetings

Central London: Every Wednesday, 7pm. 07792 282830; ben@communiststudents.org.uk.

Manchester: Every Tuesday, 5pm, students union. manchestercommuniststudents@googlemail.com.

Sheffield: Every Sunday, 7pm. 07949 763130; sabbagh1984@googlemail.com.

Stop the carnage

Monday July 13, 5pm: Protest to mark 179th death of a British soldier in Afghanistan, Downing Street. Or at 5pm on the day (except Saturday or Sunday) the total reaches 179 - the same number as in Iraq.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: 020 7801 2768; www.stopwar.org.uk.

Afghanistan in the media

Monday July 13, 7pm: Public meeting, 'The good war?', Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers include Stephen Grey, journalist; Guy Smallman, just returned from Afghanistan; and Seumas Milne, *Guardian* columnist.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: 020 7801 2768; www.stopwar.org.uk.

People's Parliament

Wednesday July 15, 6pm: Emergency session, Parliament Square, London SW1. Reduce emissions by 10% by 2010, halt domestic flights, 55mph speed limit.

Organised by Campaign Against Climate Change: info@campaigncc.org.

Keep Metro Public

Thursday July 16, 7pm: First annual meeting, Tyneside Irish Centre, Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne. Buffet and entertainment.

Organised by RMT: www.rmt.org.uk.

Mobilise against BNP

Saturday July 18, 10am to 5pm: Conference, Central Hall, 4-5 Oldham Street, Manchester M1. £10/£5.

Saturday August 15, 9am: Protest against BNP rally, Codnor, Derbyshire. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: www.uaf.org.uk.

Benefit gig

Saturday July 25, 2pm to 12 midnight: benefit gig, Sawyers Venue, 44 Montague Street, Kettering, Northants. With Temple Hedz, Aurora and many more. Donation on door.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: 020 7801 2768; www.stopwar.org.uk.

Cricket for the people of Iran

Saturday August 1, 12 noon: Fundraising match, Hands Off the People of Iran v Labour Representation Committee, Low Halls sports ground, South Access Road, London E17.

Hopi (captain: Attila the Stockbroker) will play LRC (captain: John McDonnell MP) in a 30-over game to raise £1,000 for our comrades in Iran. Also 'calypso cricket', bar, barbecue, car boot sale, stalls for organisations and campaigns.

Followed by benefit gig, Dalston social centre, 2a Belgrade Road, London N16, with Attila the Stockbroker, Tickin' Time Bomb John, the Avatars and many more.

Organised by Hopi (Ben: 07792 282830) and LRC (Rory: 07790 007273).

Rage Against Labour

Sunday September 27, 12 noon: Demonstration at Labour conference, Brighton. Details to be announced.

Organised by UCU and NUJ.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

RDG

To contact the Revolutionary Democratic Group, email: rdgroup@yahoo.co.uk

IRAN

Tehran: between two and three million

Our solidarity and theirs

Yassamine Mather examines a regime in crisis and looks to working class forces for a solution

The continuation of demonstrations and protests against the Islamic republic of Iran, albeit on a smaller scale than two weeks ago, have fuelled further divisions at every level of the religious state: the Shia scholars of Ghom oppose the clerics in the Council of Guardians; leaders of the Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guard) are arrested for siding with the 'reformist camp'; senior ayatollahs are divided, with Ali Saneii and Ali Montazeri declaring the election results fraudulent, while most other grand ayatollahs have remained loyal to the supreme leader.

Nearly a month after the elections, the political crisis in Iran still dominates events in the Middle East, while in the country itself most people, irrespective of their political allegiance, agree that the situation has changed so dramatically over the last few weeks that nothing in the Islamic republic will ever be the same again.

With the exception of isolated believers in conspiracy theories, no-one doubts that the Iranian people have expressed loud and clear their desire for an end to the current political system and - in view of the fact that the 'reformists' keep wasting valuable time, still expecting miracles from above - it is the entire Islamic order, not just the conservatives, whose future is called into question.

Let us be clear: most Iranians do not believe a word of government claims that the protests were organised from outside Iran. As far as they are concerned, this crisis has all the hallmarks of one made in the Islamic republic. The regime has relied on crisis after crisis to survive over the last 30 years, constantly using real and imaginary foreign threats as an excuse for failure to deliver on any of its promises of equality and prosperity for the masses. A victory for Mir-Hossein Mousavi, coinciding with a new administration in the US, carried the 'danger' of reducing, albeit temporarily, tensions with America, thus depriving the Islamic regime of its convenient external scapegoat. That could not be allowed to happen.

The supreme leader, ayatollah Ali Khamenei, admits he favoured

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and clearly as early as this spring, before the 'selection' of the final candidates, plans for an Ahmadinejad victory were in the pipeline. Our arrogant supreme leader could not resist the temptation of a premature announcement. From April he used a number of public occasions to declare his wish for, and confidence in, four more years of an Ahmadinejad presidency. Presumably this is when plans for the stuffing of ballot boxes were organised - boxes that were still being discovered in the corridors and libraries of the ministry of the interior last week.

However, at a time of conflict over the country's nuclear programme, Iran's rulers needed to demonstrate their legitimacy to the 'international community'. Ignoring the level of dissatisfaction and opposition that existed in the country, once the number of candidates was reduced to four members of the inner circles of the religious state's factions, an election show beyond anything seen in the last 30 years was sanctioned. The press and the media of the reformist faction were given a short-lived relative freedom. Within the framework of the existing order, all four candidates were allowed to expose the shortcomings of their opponents.

Corruption, incompetence, lies and deceit came out into the open, and even Ahmadinejad, certain of Khamenei's backing, went beyond the normal red lines of the Shia state. But the elite of the Islamic republic, in both factions, underestimated the level of hatred and anger towards the regime amongst the young, who make up over 70% of the population. An Iranian sociologist, speaking from Tehran, compared this anger to a glass of water getting fuller and fuller: "We all failed to notice it, until the last drop - but then the election process caused it to overflow."

Most Iranians were already familiar with the huge wealth, accumulated through corruption, of Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, former president and current chairman of the Assembly of Experts. It was the foreign account of Khamenei's close relatives (including his son, whose personal account of £1.6 billion has been frozen in London) and the charts show-

ing the position of Ahmadinejad's relatives in the most important financial posts that deprived the conservative front runner of any credibility. Looking back at the turbulent election period, clearly workers' organisations and Marxist groups who advocated a boycott, at a time of mass hysteria around Mousavi's candidacy, were right to do so.

It is obvious that Khamenei, surrounded as he is by subservient advisers, underestimated the fury that followed the dashing of hopes - otherwise he might have chosen a more modest percentage for the Ahmadinejad 'victory'. But in order to establish Ahmadinejad as the truly legitimate leader of the Iranian people, Khamenei needed a higher vote than the 20 million claimed by Khatami in 1997.

Looking back at the election, it is possible that the Islamic order could have been saved had the regime decided to pull an Ahmadinejad victory with a smaller margin or even in the second round. Alternatively, a Mousavi presidency, despite the problems posed by his exaggerated promises of personal freedom within the religious state, would undoubtedly have lengthened the life of the Islamic regime by a few years, until yet another generation of Iranian youth, fooled by promises of reform, witnessed the ineptitude and unwillingness to change of our modernist Islamists. Once the results were announced, however, it soon became clear that Mousavi is a weak character - and his popularity continues to plummet, as he struggles to tail the mass movement.

Working class

According to reports from Iran, on June 13, as the Mousavi camp dithered, it was students and activists of the left who first took to the streets of Tehran in the initial protests. They were joined by demonstrators from working class districts of Tehran who hate Ahmadinejad.

In the words of a leaflet by Iran Khodro workers, his "exhibitionist distribution of cash in the poor districts of major cities is an insult to the Iranian working class". Oil workers in Tehran state that Iranian workers, whose strikes in 1979 brought down the shah, do not

want charity and remind us of their demands over the last four years: the abolition of 'white' (temporary) contracts, an end to mass unemployment and low wages, the prompt payment of wages, better housing - the real grievances of the poor and the working class. Workers in Iran are well aware that Ahmadinejad's government cannot and will not respond to such demands - it is still seeking to maintain its position as the IMF's model for the implementation of neoliberal economic policies.

Iran Khodro workers warn of the disastrous consequences of printing money during hyperinflation and compare Ahmadinejad's economic policies with those of Mugabe in Zimbabwe. Addressing fellow workers, they say: "It is the Iranian working class who will pay for Ahmadinejad's mad economic policies."

In fact right from the beginning it has been workers, unemployed youth and students - who have suffered under four years of military presence on campuses - who have been in the forefront of the protests. Young women in particular hate the regime for its constant interference in their daily lives. They are the ones whose early presence on the streets of Tehran on June 15 encouraged hundreds of thousands of people - including, yes, people from Tehran's middle class districts - to join the protests, which prompted Mousavi to attend the demonstration himself late in the afternoon. They are the ones who are continuing the protests even as the repression intensifies. In the absence of any clear direction from Mousavi or fellow reformist candidate Mehdi Karroubi, these are the forces that have called for demonstrations on July 9, the anniversary of the student protests of 1998.

No-one can doubt the significance of June 15. For years Iranians had felt isolated, demoralised and fearful of the regime. On that Monday, according to Tehran's mayor, around three million people were on the streets of the capital. In Isfahan, the historic Shah Jahan square - one of the largest open squares in the world - was jammed with protesters. Shiraz and Tabriz saw similarly huge

demonstrations. The Iranian people had finally spoken and the solidarity they found in those protests has given them unprecedented confidence and the sense of victory.

As in 1979, it is this confidence that encourages them to confront the most brutal forms of repression with courage and determination. Unarmed demonstrators confront the Bassij, apparently with no fear for their lives, and those who claim that such courage and determination are a feature of the middle classes have no understanding of the realities of Iranian society. Last week during a protest in a shanty town near Tehran, where the regular battles of those living beyond the official Tehran border with the authorities has resulted in the deployment of the Bassij (the hated Islamic militia used against protesters), the crowd shouted "Death to the dictator", attacked the Bassij and succeeded in forcing them to retreat, leaving behind their motorcycles.

In working class districts of Tehran, groups of people have been throwing paint on photos of the supreme leader, writing slogans under his portraits and using every opportunity to taunt the religious militia with slogans such as 'Death to Khamenei' and the rhyming chant, "*Rahbar ma olagheh - ye dastesham cholagheh*" ("Our supreme leader is an ass - one of his arms is paralysed"). Iran's state television is also under attack after broadcasting the 'confessions' of young demonstrators, who, bruised and exhausted, are shown on TV admitting they are 'agents of foreign powers'.

If the middle class districts of Tehran have been quiet during the day (at night people do go on rooftops throughout the city), the working class districts - in the factories, mines and shanty towns - have been the scene of impromptu protests. On July 1 thousands of workers in a mine in Khuzestan province started a strike and when security forces arrived to disperse a sit-in, the workers shouted "Death to the dictator". Haft Tapeh sugar cane workers restarted their strike on Sunday July 5, accusing the authorities of failing to deal

with their previous demands.

Discussions about a general strike are continuing and last week after almost three weeks of organising demonstrations, an organisation calling itself the Workers' Committee in Defence of Mass Protests issued a number of statements regarding the organisation of demonstrations - security measures that should be taken, advice on what to do if the Bassij attack, as well as detailed suggestions regarding civil disobedience.

Debacle

With every day that passes the two reformist candidates are losing support. Having spent two weeks hoping for a breakthrough with the cleric-led Guardian Council, Karroubi, Moussavi and finally former reformist president Mohammad Khatami issued statements calling the election results, together with the new government, illegitimate. However, ordinary Iranians are furious at Moussavi's reference to the current debacle as an argument "within the Islamic family", while the reformists' ally in the Council of Experts, ayatollah Rafsanjani was seeking the vote of enough 'councillors' in order to demote, or at least put pressure on, the supreme leader.

As always, the reformists are aware that their destiny is tied to that of the regime, yet by seeking solutions within the ruling circles, while promising the impossible to the crowds in the street, they are digging their own graves. They know they only gained support in June 2009 because many Iranians decided to opt for the lesser of two evils. Once the clerical regime denied this limited opportunity and slammed the door, the days of support for Moussavi and Karroubi were numbered. However, no-one should underestimate the effect this unprecedented schism at the highest level of the Islamic regime will have.

The Islamic republic is a complicated beast. Power lies in a twisted web of clerical, executive, judicial and military circles: the Guardian Council, the Council of Experts, the majles (Islamic parliament), Council for the Safeguarding of National Interests, the government led by the president, civil, criminal and 'revolutionary' (political) courts, the army/Pasdaran, Bassij, various Islamic associations (some calling themselves parties) ...

Until now all of these forces, whatever their differences and factional allegiances, ended up obeying the supreme leader. In fact throughout the last 30 years the most important role played by both Khomeini and Khomeini, as *vali faghih* (supreme leader), was as an arbiter of power between the various factions. All this came to an end on June 19, when Khomeini declared the presidential voting results accurate and sided with Ahmadinejad. It is therefore correct, as Hamid Dabashi does in the Cairo weekly, *Al Ahram*, to identify the supreme leader as the principal loser in the current situation (June 25-July 1).

The second loser is Ahmadinejad - the incompetent racist who in the 1980s was an interrogator in Evin prison, often leading the post-torture questioning of leftwing activists, and who is in his element as the loyal servant of the supreme cleric.

The reformists are also losers in this process - every day that goes by, their support continues to drop. They are caught in a corner, trying to save an Islamic order that is not prepared to compromise even with them.

But there are winners too - the peoples of Iran, the demonstrators, those who risk their lives every day against the regime and its military might. The repression is severe, brutal and unlike anything seen since the 1980s. However, this only shows the desperation of the regime. The demonstrators are winning.

The creative way in which they have used every opportunity to voice their hatred of the current regime has given them hope and confidence, which makes it certain that the current conflict will not end until the regime is overthrown. It has

made too many enemies, especially amongst the youth and the poor, for anyone to be able to contemplate its survival.

In the forefront of those who have defied fear and repression to go onto the streets of Tehran are women (many of them under 30) who will never forget how Pasdars arrested them for showing a fringe of hair and how they were subsequently flogged (in many cases 60-80 lashes) for this 'crime'. Young men and women who over the last decades have been arrested, humiliated and imprisoned not just for expressing political opinions, but in hundreds of thousands of cases for failing to adhere to strict interpretations of Islamic dress or behavioural codes.

Students who are tired of the interference of the state in every aspect of their private and public lives; workers who have faced poverty, non-payment of wages; shantytown dwellers who are in daily conflict with the authorities over lack of water or electricity; relatives of those killed by the regime, and not just in recent protests, when at least 100 people have lost their lives, but also of those executed by the regime for their political beliefs in 1979, the 1980s and 90s (and let us not forget that the executioners of Iran's political prisoners belong to both the 'reformist' and the conservative camp): none of them will forgive or forget the criminals responsible.

In the last few days parents of those arrested in recent demonstrations have been gathering every lunchtime outside Iranian prisons, demanding the release of the prisoners and justice for those killed by the Bassij. Too many people in Iran find another four years of Ahmadinejad too awful to contemplate - they will not stop their protests, with or without Moussavi and Karroubi.

Solidarity

The Islamic regime had the chance to entice people with promises of a slightly less repressive order under a Moussavi presidency, but blew it. However, faced with severe repression at home and the continued threat of military attack (a second Israeli nuclear submarine is now getting close to the Persian Gulf), the one kind of 'solidarity' the people of Iran do not need is the one offered by the imperialist states and their 'regime change' associates in Iran. The enemies of the Iranian working class - in the Moussavi camp, amongst royalists or within the confused left - will seek support from European states, the US administration, rightwing trade unions, liberal NGOs, media personalities ... while the defenders of the Iranian working class will remain vigilant in choosing our allies.

In Hands Off the People of Iran we have maintained our consistent, principled, anti-imperialist, anti-regime stance, and we are in an excellent position to build a much larger campaign in support of the struggles of the Iranian people. In doing so we welcome the cooperation of all Iranian and international forces that share our principles. But let me be clear - we cannot unite with supporters of Moussavi or those who seek war or sanctions instead of, or as a short cut to, revolutionary change from below. We will not suspend our criticisms of those prepared to tolerate imperialist war or economic sanctions - measures that will harm Iranian workers first and foremost.

There are calls for political sanctions against Iran now being proposed by liberals such as Shirin Ebadi and by two of the three splinters from the Worker-communist Party of Iran.

It is not our business to advise Washington or London what measures they ought to take against Tehran - quite the opposite. We say they should stop interfering in Iran. Instead we seek solidarity from below - amongst workers, trade unionists and anti-capitalist forces - with the struggles of the Iranian people. That is the essence of our politics and we will not be diverted from it ●

Hopi

Anti-imperialism of fools

Hands Off the People of Iran organised a well attended fringe meeting at the University of London Union to coincide with the Socialist Workers Party's Marxism event on Saturday July 4.

The idea was to help generate a more forceful and effective solidarity with the Iranian masses, hopefully with the cooperation of the SWP and others on the left. To that end the SWP, as well as the Socialist Party in England and Wales, were invited to send a speaker, but unfortunately neither replied to Hopi's request.

As it was, the two platform speakers and Hopi stalwarts, John McDonnell MP and Yasmine Mather, made an excellent case for stepping up our solidarity work. Comrade McDonnell welcomed the mass movement that had been generated around the election protests in Iran - they were far too massive to have been created by the CIA. The obvious split in the ruling class has provided the Iranian people with a window of opportunity and we must act in their support.

Comrade McDonnell was clear that he was not calling for support for Moussavi, whom he described as a "butcher of socialists" the last time he was in office during the Iraq war. Nor was he impressed by Hugo Chavez's endorsement of Ahmadinejad, although he hoped that this disagreement would not split the anti-imperialist movement. More people in Britain were now more familiar with the political situation in Iran, and this should create favourable opportunities for Hopi to grow.

Comrade Mather gave us a detailed analysis of the situation in Iran, much of which is covered elsewhere in this paper (see opposite - ed), so I will not dwell on it here, but move on to the discussion from the floor, which mostly revolved around the stance socialists should adopt in the event of a conflict between the clerical regime and US imperialism.

Everyone agreed that a military invasion was not on the cards, although Mike Macnair thought a 'shock and awe'

bombing campaign, including tactical nuclear weapons, was a possibility (others thought this was impossible because the US required a functioning Iran, not a state of chaos). Everyone also agreed that we should unequivocally oppose sanctions, but there was some disagreement over whether they were a preliminary to hot war, as was the case with Iraq, or merely a coercive measure aimed at bringing Iran to heel. Either way, it is clear that the US still hopes to achieve regime change despite Obama's soothing rhetoric.

A speaker from the Spartacist League denounced Hopi and all that sailed with her because John McDonnell was a member of the imperialist Labour Party, while the CPGB and other left groups involved in Hopi had supported the mullahs in 1979. Her case would have been stronger had it been more accurate. Stuart King for Permanent Revolution pointed out that his group came out of Workers Power, which had not supported the ayatollahs, while John Bridge explained that the forerunner of the *Weekly Worker*, *The Leninist*, carried an article in its first issue in 1981 denouncing "the butcher Khomeini". As for comrade McDonnell, he was rebelling against Labour's imperialism, not acting as an apologist for it.

A point of real difference was raised by the Spartacist comrade, however. In the event of an imperialist invasion, the slogan should not be 'Hands off the people of Iran', she said, but the unconditional defence of Iran against imperialism. For the Sparts the essential political unit is not class, but the state. They claim that this is the authentic view of Trotsky. It certainly was the authentic view of Stalin.

Alan Davies of the International Bolshevik Tendency put the same point in a different way. For him, when push comes to shove, there are only three possible positions: pro-imperialism, as with the Alliance for Workers' Liberty; anti-imperialism, epitomised, of course, by the IBT itself; and "neutrality", as

advocated by Hopi. As with their Spartacist parents, the IBT comrades never contemplate an independent working class position in conflicts between two reactionary powers. And, as everyone knows, it is impossible to make a concrete analysis of a real situation and chose the most appropriate tactics for the circumstances, because we are forearmed with a biblically derived absolute truth. Such is the anti-imperialism of fools.

The Spartacist speaker proudly declared that her organisation calls for the arming of the Islamic regime with nuclear weapons, while simultaneously advocating its overthrow by the Iranian working class. Not only does Iran have the right to acquire nuclear weapons, but the duty to develop them as the most reliable defence against imperialist attack. The USA did not dare nuke North Vietnam thanks to the Soviet Union's missile defence umbrella - although that did not seem to prevent the massive use of conventional weapons. Stan Keable of the CPGB made the obvious point that arming the state with advanced weaponry strengthens its hand and weakens working class forces seeking to overthrow it.

Comrade McDonnell was frustrated by the Spartacist rant and suggested that someone suffering torture in an Iranian jail was unlikely to give a damn about the position of Workers Power in 1979. Our job was to provide solidarity in the here and now. Which is true, but not the whole story. The Sparts played a useful role in reminding us that political positions that proved disastrous in the past are still common currency on the left and can have just as disastrous consequences the second time around. Hopi was not allowed to affiliate to the Stop the War Coalition precisely because of wrong theory, which harms our ability to deliver solidarity now. And the situation in Iran itself is no different - Iranian workers need a theoretical understanding that will see them better armed than in 1979 ●

Phil Kent

Summer Offensive

Still on course

This year's Marxism - the annual school of the Socialist Workers Party - brought thousands of people into central London for five days of meetings, rallies and cultural events.

The organisers will have been pretty pleased with the whole thing. The general consensus was that the numbers were up on last year; there was a relatively high percentage of young people; the sun shone (mostly) and there were no punch-ups or other embarrassing incidents.

The school had an oddly timeless feel to it, however. The SWP clearly uses this event - the political high point of its year - essentially as a showcase for the organisation, an extended recruitment fair. So, while there are meetings of contemporary significance - a themed series on the economic crisis, for example - the gathering is not used to genuinely theorise the practice of the group, to deal with political problems and divisions that inevitably arise when an organisation that thinks does anything in the real world.

After all, the SWP has had a rather tumultuous year or so. There has been the messy break-up of Respect. There

was the disaster of the Left Alternative and the demoralised retreat from electoral intervention. Then there was the explicit exclusion of the SWP from No2EU and the organisation's open letter, proposing yet another 'unity initiative' to a profoundly distrustful left. Plenty of food for thought - and debate - there, one would have assumed.

But the whole culture of the SWP, like much of the rest of the left, precludes sharp and open clashes of opinion. The general level of the event as a whole suffers because of this and it creates the audience it deserves - passive, impatient with controversy and with a pronounced tendency to agree with party 'orthodoxy' rather than seek out political challenges from other trends in the movement.

Reflecting this, the CPGB stall did steady, but unspectacular trade on the three days it was pitched. Over £100 of literature was sold, mostly in the form of copies of the *Weekly Worker*. That is included in this week's tally of £983 towards our annual fundraising drive, the Summer Offensive.

Our overall total is £9,562.50, as we

hit the rough halfway point in this year's campaign.

Particular thanks to comrade WD who has sent us another £10 - her third contribution to this year's SO; likewise comrades MM and SM, who both provided us with £40 - for MM it was his third donation to this year's campaign; comrade AL sends us a very useful £200 and there are quite a number of younger comrades whose smaller, but still important, donations came in via standing orders at the start of the month.

No donations via the website to report, though, despite the continuing recovery of our internet readership following the recent crashing of our site (we had 10,677 online visitors last week).

Nevertheless, not a bad week by any means. We are on course for a good total. But no complacency, comrades ●

Howard Roake

Help the Summer Offensive. Fill in a standing order form (back page), or send cheques, payable to Weekly Worker

AGGREGATE

Assessing Iran, debating the nature of the Labour Party

Jim Moody reports on discussions among CPGB members

Two topics dominated the CPGB members' aggregate meeting on July 4: Iran and the Labour Party. While the first topic for discussion was largely uncontentious, discussion on the Labour Party continued to explore disagreements that were aired at the previous aggregate.

Yassamine Mather introduced the section on Iran, reporting primarily on the rigged election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and how things will never be the same again. She opened by asking why Iran's rulers decided to fix such a high percentage vote for Ahmadinejad - the perception of having obtained a clear majority within a thriving democracy was important for the regime to claim legitimacy, not least for the purpose of negotiations with the USA and the EU.

There was no simple military-clerical division at the top in Iran: a dramatic, irresolvable cleavage runs right through the higher echelons of both the military and leading clerics. Protests over vote-fixing were so large because prior to the election space had been permitted - and in the last few weeks before the vote real debate took place. But on the day after the election masses of ordinary people saw the process turned on its head and so joined the spontaneous demonstrations. At first the middle classes stayed at home - the opposite of what the world's bourgeois media reported: they wanted to pretend that the mass movement was almost purely a middle class phenomenon.

Two to three million demonstrated in Tehran, with part of the organisation falling to old-time left activists - 70% of Iran's current population was born after the 1979 revolution. Establishment oppositionists such as the Mir-Hossein Mousavi camp were nonplussed by the turn of events and failed to become involved in the popular protests until very late in the day.

Unintimidated, students and women were at the forefront of the protests. They were joined by many previously uninvolved in politics. None want to go back to the way things were - they are demanding the end of the regime itself.

The fact that the Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi factions of the 'respectable' opposition - the so-called reformists - have been in disarray in recent weeks has allowed repression to grow. Their very failure, though, has radicalised the wider opposition movement. Reformists continue looking for deliverance from within the ranks of the elite itself. They would like to keep disputes within the 'family', and, as former president Mohammad Khatami has stated, want to keep things as they are in readiness for some kind of velvet revolution. In other words, the reformists' destiny is tied closely to that of the Islamic Republic. This is why they invest their hopes in those above them and not in the crowds and demonstrations. However, trying to gain a majority in the Council of Experts to oust the supreme leader is a dead end.

Meanwhile, the regime relies on the Bassij militia and its motorcycle storm-troopers, but there can be no doubt that people are ready to resist. In the shanty towns, periodically bulldozed by the local authorities, the Bassij have already met their match: in one incident they were repulsed so strongly when trying to move against inhabitants that they had to flee minus their motorbikes.

One big loser in the recent protests



Gordon Brown: does he lead a bourgeois workers' party?

has been ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the highest-ranking political and religious authority. By issuing statements in favour of Ahmadinejad's faction of the elite he exposed the falsity of claims that the supreme leader stood above the contending parties and opened the way for calls for separation of religion and state.

Ahmadinejad's practice of handing out cash to the poor like a feudal lord is regarded as a patronising insult by workers who have not been paid what they are owed. Over 4,000 have been on strike in the mining industry over non-payment of wages, which remains a very common phenomenon. These struggles have also become politicised recently, with workers now using the slogan, 'Death to the dictator' and others revived from the 1979 revolution. Factory committees, such as at the Iran Khodro car plant, have produced anti-regime leaflets and within the last few weeks activists of the Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers have set up a Workers' Committee in Defence of Mass Protests.

Repression is severe. So many have been arrested, the regime has established camps to house what existing prisons cannot hold. No-one takes 'confessions' by captured demonstrators and activists any more seriously than they do regime claims that the protests were a result of British imperialist incitement.

The demonstrations built a sense that 'we are all in it together'. Sadly, some on the left still imagine it is necessary to work within Islamic structures to achieve any advance. The role of the left must be to provide a serious alternative strategy, although we must be wary of putting forward dogmatic prescriptions.

In the discussion that followed, *Weekly Worker* editor Peter Manson suggested that the differences on the Iranian left need to be properly aired in this newspaper. John Bridge said our main responsibility was to re-equip the left in Britain about how to deliver solidarity, lining up neither with imperialism

nor with the regime. The CPGB must put more resources into Hopi and try to draw fresh forces into it, including groups like the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

James Turley reported that the SWP leaders are (barely) critical backers of Mousavi, not allies of the most radical elements in Iran. Alex Callinicos now says the exact opposite of what he said previously, when he was apologising for Ahmadinejad. Fraternal visitor Moshé Machover thought that, while the SWP would not support Ahmadinejad, it also would not attack its erstwhile Islamist allies. Mike Macnair took issue with this, pointing out that the SWP had not only broken with Galloway, but with some of its previous Islamist allies from the Respect period too.

Replying to the discussion, comrade Mather noted that some, such as the Worker-communist Party of Iran, were already calling for more sanctions. She also reported the testimony of a number of former prisoners identifying Ahmadinejad as a former torturer in Evin prison.

Labour Party

Introducing the item on the Labour Party, Mike Macnair said it was no novelty to describe it as a bourgeois workers' party. There is certainly space to its left, and a united Marxist challenge, even in current conditions, could potentially yield 5%-10% support in elections. But the Labour Party has not abandoned the traditional space it has always occupied, which is why the various attempts to construct a left alternative on the basis of *Labourism* are futile.

In the recent Euro elections, we were not abstractly calling for a vote for Labour. In this case a vote for the Labour Party was a class vote, for the idea of a working class party. Of course, we accept that voting Labour can also have another, negative, aspect - that of a vote for constitutionalism, nationalism, etc. However, in the absence of anything remotely resembling a move towards a Communist Party, we considered the call

to vote Labour was the best way of putting over our message.

The party projects of the left groups can, of course, be given critical support, but we have to judge them in the concrete: on the basis of whether they can be viewed as a step towards the party we are striving to create. 'No to the EU, Yes to Democracy' was a red-brown formation. Its extreme anti-EU nationalism gave the lie to SPEW's claim that No2EU contained the seeds of a new party of the working class: in fact on this issue it was to the right of the Labour Party. That was why, in the absence of leading No2EU candidates meeting our conditions for support, it was essential to draw a hard line against No2EU.

In the coming general election, the right-populist thrust represented by the UK Independence Party may well benefit the Tories. In Scotland, the Scottish National Party may displace the Labour Party in terms of MPs. As to the far-left groups, there are two possibilities. First, if there is no agreement, as many as six right-moving 'broad' alternatives may vie for support - in which case it is likely we will again call for a Labour vote. Second, if there is a degree of left coordination, even on the basis of Labourism, we may call for full, partial, conditional or critical support.

The phenomenon of a bourgeois workers' party is not unique to Britain, nor is it peculiar to imperialist countries, said comrade Macnair. They exist in some form wherever there is a sizeable working class, representing concessions by capital. They occur, for example, across Africa, so Lenin's explanation that imperialist superprofits buy off the workers is not the whole story - concessions to the working class are not limited to imperialist countries. The Labour Party is still most definitely a bourgeois workers' party - it remains institutionally dependent on the trade unions.

The legalisation of trade unions, universal suffrage, the NHS, mass education - these are real concessions to the working class. But they are due to the decline of capitalism, not to the

existence of imperialism. In the UK, the bourgeoisie would prefer to deal with the trade unions through a liberal party. This is why the Labour Party is being undermined.

In discussion, John Bridge said that, after 1914, the 'exceptional' British Labour Party became the rule in the rest of Europe. However, super-profits cannot explain social democracy's existence outside the imperialist countries: Kremlin influence on 'official' communist parties was an important factor which turned them toward class collaboration.

Nick Rogers said we need to theorise more fully about the basis on which we characterise Labour as a bourgeois workers' party, taking account of the social democratic tradition in Europe as well. He thought the most class-conscious part of the working class recognised the need for a Labour Party. Returning to the question of the EU elections, comrade Rogers failed to see how making the question of militias a condition for offering support to No2EU candidates exposed SPEW.

Jim Moody, for his part, thought that exposing the No2EU red-brown lash-up was important, especially over the question of militias and workers' self-defence. In fact, it was crucial, as the responses to our question showed that SPEW was just as willing to give up basic tenets of Marxism as the Socialist Workers Party had been in Respect. He also noted that the description 'bourgeois workers' party' was deliberately oxymoronic, since it was obviously not a workers' party as such. We were not aiming to strengthen the left of the Labour Party and need not care unduly which pole was stronger, whether bourgeois or workers'.

Comrade Machover saw the Labour Party as having been set up partly as an electoral machine, but Tony Blair had made it *purely* about elections. Now, its executive is powerless: Labour is under the complete control of the rightwing leadership and pays no heed to the unions. Calling for a blanket vote for Labour only helps move it to the right. We should punish Labour by voting for the left and never abstain. Comrade Bridge responded that what has changed is the power of the NEC to embarrass the leadership. It was always the case that, when the NEC and conference had passed critical votes, the Labour government of the day would ignore them and carry on as before. However, he agreed with comrade Machover about the need to distinguish between left and right. It will be possible to do that in next year's general election, unlike the recent EU elections. But what was crucial was organising an effective left. The CPGB should support moves towards a united left bloc in the 2010 general election.

Comrade Macnair concluded that it was not a question of 'reclaiming' Labour. Thanks to bureaucratic clamp-down, the former activist base of Labour has atrophied; but Blair's dream of young professionals fulfilling that role has also failed. The trade union bureaucrats still hold Labour's purse strings - they could have stopped Blair if they had wanted to; their noises of opposition were mere pretence in response to pressure from their members.

However, if the project undertaken by Blair to transform Labour into a bourgeois party were to continue, it would not convert it into a Liberal or US Democrat party: it would more likely destroy the party altogether ●

IRAN

Election confounds pundits

Assaf Kfoury looks at the confusion in the US on right and left

Close scrutiny of reports in the American media on Iran's June 12 election reveals a wide range of contradictory and unsubstantiated claims. Some of it is speculation for lack of information, to be sure, but some is also wishful thinking to fit ideological assumptions.

It is not just a matter of left versus right. Contradictory claims have been expressed by people within the same ideological camp. At the end, behind the outrage or the rhetorical flourish, they are not any closer to a consistent account of the Iranian events.

There are many questions that have elicited claims and counter-claims. Who won the June 12 election, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad or Mir-Hossein Mousavi, is only one such question. Among others are the following: how skewed are the percentages: the 85% for voter turnout, the officially announced 63% for Ahmadinejad, and the 34% for Mousavi? Beyond counting percentages, which of the two major candidates has majority support among the rural poor, or the urban middle class, or the students and the young unemployed? In what way is Mousavi a "reformist", a "socialist" or a "left Islamist", as he has been variously called - or is he something else entirely? How is it that Mousavi's chief backer in the political establishment, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, transmuted from the "most corrupt" mullah (according to frequent past reports in the west) to a "reformist" politician? These are a few among many questions that have produced conflicting answers. Reasonable readers should be excused for being confused.

But so what? From a left perspective in the US, these questions are in fact of little importance, interesting as they may be under different circumstances. They are unrelated to the hard task of building an effective mass movement that can restrain or block the government's right-wing drift domestically and its bullying in the Middle East and elsewhere. If anything, they have deflected attention from a more important and immediate task facing the anti-war movement: how to counter the very real possibility of an attack on Iran.

For months now, there have been loud claims that Iran's nuclear programme is an "existential threat" to Israel and the rest of the world. This is, of course, utter bunk and very dangerous bombast. Assuming Iran had such a capability, could a nuclear attack against Israel be calibrated so that it will destroy the Israelis but not the Palestinians in their midst (and Iran's ally, Hamas), and not the Lebanese (and Iran's ally, Hezbollah) a few kilometres to the north, and not the Jordanians a few kilometres to the east? Could Iran's nuclear warheads, if they existed and were launched, destroy Israel's seat of government without incinerating Jerusalem and covering both Arabs and Israelis with radioactive fallout?

For all the declarations about the need to "engage Iran diplomatically" by Obama and his advisors, they are also planning for a possible bombing campaign; no doubt only a fraction of these plans has been revealed to the general public.¹

If they carry out the threat of destroying Iran's nuclear installations - spread over a country larger in size than the UK, France and Germany combined, with a population of 70 million - it will provoke retaliation and bring untold devastation to an already deeply wounded region. This is a far more ominous issue than all the impassioned talks about Iran's election results.

Below is a sample of American reactions to Iran's June 12 election and its

aftermath. Needless to say, our sample below is illustrative, not exhaustive, moving from right to left across the political spectrum.

Unrepentant neo-cons

From the far right, neo-conservative opinions have been the most homogeneous and therefore the least unexpected. They come from government officials, academics and media commentators - predictably hawkish, elitist and racist - with different degrees of chilling recommendations.

Elliott Abrams, deputy national security adviser in the Bush administration, decided before even June 12 that Iran's presidential election is a "travesty", because "voting in Iran is a contrivance for settling certain policy disputes and personal rivalries within the ruling elite". Abrams predicts there will be no significant change in the Obama administration after June 12, regardless of who is president. He therefore warns western leaders against "the delusion that a new president would mean new opportunities to negotiate away Iran's nuclear programme".²

After June 12, as violent clashes erupted between the Ahmadinejad and Mousavi camps, neo-cons have consistently reproached the Obama administration for its cautious approach. The latter may be the result of necessity rather than benevolence, with Iraq still burning to the west and Afghanistan heating up to the east. But no matter. Paul Wolfowitz, a former deputy secretary of defence, recommends: "Now is not the time for the president to dig in to a neutral posture. It is time to change course."³

John Bolton, a former US ambassador to the UN, goes further, as if he is competing with fellow neo-cons for the most outlandish - and dangerous - stance. He recommends that now is the time to bomb Iran and take out its nuclear programme. His twisted logic makes him believe that the current "uprising in Iran makes it more likely that an effective public diplomacy campaign could be waged in the country to explain to Iranians that such an attack is directed against the regime, not against the Iranian people ... Military action against Iran's nuclear programme and the ultimate goal of regime change can be worked together consistently."⁴

Anyone with an ounce of sanity would normally ignore such odious pronouncements. But they are considered within the limits of 'respectable' opinion, from influential individuals in Washington, and therefore merit attention.

The newspaper of record

The *New York Times* is the newspaper of record in the US and generally speaks for the American ruling elites. With minor shades of differences, its editorial page and all of its regular columnists are firm believers in American exceptionalism, overtly or not. They work in near unison on exalting Obama's personal qualities and promoting the fiction that he represents a radical departure from policies pursued by earlier presidents.

Within these narrow limits, more stringent still when it comes to the Middle East, Roger Cohen is one of the saner voices among the *NYT* columnists. Before the June 12 election, Cohen warned repeatedly about the lunacy of a military strike against Iran's nuclear centres, to his credit, without playing advocate for either Ahmadinejad or Mousavi. Since June 12, he has thrown his lot with the Mousavi camp, seeing in Ahmadinejad a crude demagogue who has "made many enemies along his mystical-militaristic way".⁵



Distorting prism

Apart from the differences in style between the Ahmadinejad and Mousavi camps, Cohen comes up with the theory - quite imaginative, one may say - that the contest is really about winning the "big prize" of re-establishing relations with America, because America is "dear to most Iranians". Since both sides agree on what the "big prize" is, according to Cohen, one is left wondering about what fundamentally differentiates them. Do the two sides have different terms for a rapprochement with America? Cohen does not say.

Cohen takes it for granted that defrauding occurred on a large scale and the June 12 election was a "ballot-box putsch". Perhaps. But he also makes the very doubtful claim that Obama's appeal as a person, as a "black man of part Muslim heritage", and his "outreach" to the Muslim world were crucial in making rapprochement with America the "big prize" for both sides.

Liberal and left-liberal

The *New Yorker* weekly magazine is a mouthpiece of the American liberal intelligentsia. An article by Laura Secor in its June 29 issue has no hesitation in painting Mousavi as the leader of "the forces of secular democracy" arrayed against Ahmadinejad's "autocratic theocracy" in an epic "confrontation between irreconcilables".⁶

Secor writes that Mousavi and his allies were part of the Islamic left faction in the 1980s and very much part of the establishment of the Islamic Republic. How does she explain their metamorphosis into "the forces of secular democracy"? No explanation. She flatly asserts that, in the last 20 years, "the Islamic left faction ... made one of the most dramatic turnabouts in Iran's political history. It abandoned its hard-line commitments in favour of an agenda of liberalisation, freedom of expression, the relaxation of Islamic social codes and friendlier dealings with the world." What is more, not only does Secor make the movement led by Mousavi a beacon of secular democracy, but, "whatever its origins, [it] has coalesced with extraordinary speed into a disciplined, tactically sophisticated and strikingly moderate movement". In sum, a disciplined revolutionary movement, upholding cherished liberal democratic ideals. Enough to justify Secor's air-headed enthusiasm and unmitigated support.

Robert Naiman, editor of the left-liberal online newsletter, *Just Foreign Policy*, hesitates to throw his support behind Mousavi and wants more evidence from the Iranians before deciding.⁷

In an article dated June 29, Naiman writes that he has "been reaching out to Iranians who have or can get specific

information about what happened on June 12-13." He says that "many Iranians who didn't vote for Ahmadinejad [are] deeply sceptical of opposition claims that the election on June 12 was 'stolen,' and [have] demanded that the opposition provide specific evidence of its claims". Naiman sympathises with such Iranians and takes their scepticism as demanding clarification. For whose sake does Naiman seek such clarification, the Iranians or concerned outsiders? He does not say, and perhaps he wants it for both. He concludes his article with a presumptuous and misplaced appeal: "If the opposition or its foreign supporters have evidence that the election was 'stolen', let them present it for all to see. Which ballot box do you dispute?" As if the championing of one Iranian side against the other is a prerequisite for progressive Iran-related action in America.

In the July 13 issue of the left-liberal weekly *The Nation*, Babak Sarfaraz writes paeans to "Iran's new revolutionaries". He describes the Green Wave, the popular movement supporting Mousavi, as a "multi-generational, multi-ethnic and multi-class phenomenon". Sarfaraz extols the Green Wave leaders as "sophisticated and canny" young revolutionaries. He gives the impression that the vast majority of Iranians are against Ahmadinejad, who is only kept in power by the Revolutionary Guards and the Bassij militia. Sarfaraz also details a plan purportedly drawn by Rafsanjani, as head of the Assembly of Experts, to replace the supreme leader's one-person rule (now invested in ayatollah Ali Khamenei) by a leadership council of three or more high-ranking clerics.⁸ This would be a turnover of one of the Islamic Republic's fundamental tenets, and goes beyond any speculation by others in available media reports. Is this inside information or is it wishful thinking?

Two pages later in the same issue of *The Nation*, Alexander Cockburn completely deflates Mousavi, describing him as "one of the foulest of that foul gang in the Council of the Cultural Revolution, charged with the Islamisation of Iranian society". As Iran's prime minister from 1981 to 1989, Mousavi, Cockburn reminds his readers, "sent murdering squads of thugs into every university, purging secularism and religious minorities". In fact, "Compared with the vicious [Mousavi-Rafsanjani] duo, Ahmadinejad is relatively wholesome."⁹ What is *The Nation* reader to believe, Sarfaraz's paeans or Cockburn's prompt dispatching of Mousavi?

'Leftist confusion'

Veteran journalist Reese Erlich recently posted an article entitled 'Iran and leftist

confusion' on the anarchist *ZNet* website.¹⁰ The article is valuable for the range of opinions it surveys from left activists in the US. But Erlich's purpose is not to cover *all* opinions emanating from the left. He limits his survey to individuals whom he takes to task because they oppose the opposition led by Mousavi or withhold support from it.

In his determination to rebut what he calls "leftwing Doubting Thomas arguments" point by point, Erlich also ignores reasonable criticisms of Mousavi, most notably by progressive Iranians or Iranian expatriates, some of whom are also against Ahmadinejad - just like Erlich himself. One such criticism is by Ervand Abrahamian, now a professor of history at the City University of New York, who gives a more nuanced analysis of the events surrounding the June 12 election. Abrahamian points out that Mousavi "cannot be called leftist or socialist, as several articles have described him, but rather 'statist'".¹¹

Addressing left activists in the US who are opposed to the Mousavi movement, Erlich concludes his article with the rhetorical, "Whose side are you on?"

But why the compulsion to take sides - with Mousavi or against him - here in the United States? There is already a full agenda for progressive action in relation to Iran. Left solidarity with the right to protest in Iran (and everywhere else) does not mean siding with either Mousavi or Ahmadinejad. The task of organising against the possibility of bombing Iran is enormous enough and is perhaps the best support progressives in the west can lend to the people of Iran ●

Notes

1. Yaakov Katz, 'IAF to train overseas in coming months in face of Iranian threat' *Jerusalem Post* July 5. This is not the first article reporting that the Israeli Air Force has been preparing for a military strike on Iran, no doubt with American knowledge and approval, even though the US has not given Israel the green light to attack. But this article also adds that the preparations have been conducted in coordination with the US military and other Nato members, as well as with the approval of US-allied Arab governments. After talking with a number of Arab leaders recently, former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton reportedly stated: "None of them would say anything about it publicly, but they would certainly acquiesce in an overflight if the Israelis didn't trumpet it as a big success." Saudi Arabia's acquiescence, if not cooperation, has been supported by several other reports, most recently in Uzi Mahnaimi and Sarah Baxter, 'Saudis give nod to Israeli raid on Iran' *The Sunday Times* July 5. Predictably within a day or two, the Saudi government denied the information, prominently reproduced in the Arabic press; see Agence France Presse, 'Saudi Arabia denies it would let Israeli jets pass for Iran attack' *The Daily Star* July 7.
2. Elliott Abrams, 'Lebanon's triumph, Iran's travesty' *The New York Times* June 11.
3. Paul Wolfowitz, "'No comment' is not an option' *The Washington Post* June 19.
4. John R Bolton, 'Time for an Israeli strike?' *The Washington Post* July 2.
5. Roger Cohen, 'Let the usurpers writhe' *The New York Times* July 1.
6. Laura Secor, 'Protest vote' *The New Yorker* June 29. The article is interesting to read as a lesson in hyperbolic, and at the end deceitful, writing. It is replete with expressions like "majesty of the demonstrations", "the ebullient crowds", etc.
7. Robert Naiman, 'Habib Ahmadzadeh: Mousavi must say which ballot boxes he disputes' *Just Foreign Policy* June 29.
8. Babak Sarfaraz, 'Iran's new revolutionaries' *The Nation* July 13. Babak Sarfaraz is a "pseudonym for a journalist reporting from Iran" (not identified as Iranian, though the pseudonym can be), which seemingly gives an extra authority to his writing. This is a rather frivolous game that reporters who disagree have played, claiming they have the better credentials to write about Iran because they travelled or are based in Tehran, or because they are Iranian, or if they are not Iranian, because they speak Persian.
9. Alexander Cockburn, 'Twittergasm' *The Nation* July 13.
10. Reese Erlich, 'Iran and leftist confusion' *ZNet* June 29.
11. Ervand Abrahamian interviewed by Amira Hass, 'Mousavi would shun nuclear weapons, says Iran scholar' *Ha'aretz* June 28.

REVIEW

Misunderstanding

Francis Beckett and David Hencke **Marching to the fault line: the 1984 miners' strike and the death of industrial Britain** Constable, 2009, pp420, £18.99

This book appears with a great fanfare of trumpets and publicity, recommending itself as ground-breaking - *the* comprehensive history of the strike. So how does it match up?

Using the Freedom of Information Act, previously secret government and National Coal Board archives and for the first time frank and shocking interviews with many key trade union and Labour Party figures, government and NCB officials, the authors *do* provide new insights. At the same time, though, the book is littered with throwaway, unsubstantiated statements and assertions, not to mention hearsay, gossip and folk tales. Sources are patchy and the bibliography meagre.

For a work of this scope, comprehensive use of all existing sources is a basic requirement. As it is, however, the sources are often unreliable and there are pieces filched from other works, uncredited. There are bland assumptions and unchallenged propositions. The book moves ever more relentlessly away from the presentation of events, and from the behind-the-scenes actors and action, to a merciless condemnation of Arthur Scargill pure and simple.

It is *fatally flawed* - not for the facts it discloses and the revelations it reveals, but because this information is forced into the narrow perspective of a bias which refuses to see the miners themselves, the rank and file, as having started the strike, taking all the key decisions on how it was conducted. There are frankly just too many inaccuracies to list here. Arthur's role in the move of the NUM from London to Yorkshire, his relationship with McGahey, his position on the strike and tactics; the origin and function of flying pickets; Arthur's connection with the Workers Revolutionary Party; the relationship between the women's movement and the National Union of Mineworkers; picketing operations and planning; the connection with steel, Orgreave, Scunthorpe, Immingham, Hunterson, Ravenscraig and the national dock strikes; all are gotten hopelessly wrong.

Thatcher's mission

A clash was inevitable. To this extent, the presence of Thatcher and her programme, and the existence of the trade union movement, especially the NUM and the position it occupied in society, meant the conflict was preordained. It is clear from the authors' own evidence that even if Arthur Scargill had not been born, the miners were in the cross hairs: either we fought with a chance we might win, or we surrendered without a fight and lost. The industrial history of Britain, and Thatcher's elaborate and long-term planning strategies, demonstrate that she knew the miners would fight and fight like there was going to be no tomorrow.

At the end of the tale we are told what a good union leader would have done in the circumstances - I will not spoil the story by revealing that, but I have a feeling you can already guess.

One thing this book does nail to the floor is any notion that the government was not involved in the strike: "... Peter Walker chaired a daily meeting to coordinate action during the strike with senior officials from the home office, employment, transport and the NCB and CEBG [Central Electricity Generating Board]. Twice weekly on Mondays and Wednesdays, Thatcher herself chaired MISC101 - the ministerial group on coal. Its purpose was to exchange informa-



Arthur Scargill: not his strike alone

tion, give a ministerial steer to the line with the media and work out policy" (p117).

In 1981 comes the first salvo of the war. Closure plans for anything between 20 and 40 pits are revealed. There is immediate strike action. No ballot - flying pickets call out pit after pit, or else they just strike using their own initiative when the news filters through. Many pits in Nottinghamshire and the Midlands are among them.

Within days, half the coalfields are out and Thatcher is on the back foot. Their plans are not ready yet - they have not yet stockpiled enough coal, and their police operation is not in place. Right-winger Joe Gormley is still ostensibly national president, though Arthur is president-elect. Gormley and some hand-picked members of the NEC meet NCB chiefs and secretary of state for energy David Howell, who withdraws the plan. He promises that any future pit closure will go through the normal lengthy consultation machinery. Thatcher declares she wants no fight with the miners (p33). The authors call this a government U-turn, Scottish NUM president Mick McGahey called it a "body swerve" - we knew they were coming back. It was our 'Red Friday'.¹

Over the following three years another nine million tonnes of coal was put into stocks - by the start of the strike the total stood at 48.7 million tonnes (p35). But the point is, here was another semi-official/unofficial strike (like the previous one in 1969) driving the bosses and government into a corner - and no ballot. Nobody is crying 'ballot, ballot, ballot' because it is the other side that has launched the attack on us, and we are simply responding to it. Miners see stopping the assault as the task, not sticking to the terms of rules drawn up for pre-meditated and long-considered action.

When we come to the strike itself, the authors think they have found an earth-shattering piece of evidence, which proves the strike was all a mistake. The strike proper started on March 1 1984, when George Hayes, the South Yorkshire NCB director, announced that Cortonwood would

close in five weeks time (although the book actually says March 1 1985 - p47). This was a challenge we could not ignore. The authors now say it was a *mistake* - Hayes had misunderstood his brief. So what? They go on to say that NCB chair Ian MacGregor was to have announced plans to cut 20,000 jobs six days after Hayes jumped the gun. Which in fact MacGregor went on to do, confirming the suspicions that Cortonwood was the tip of a very big iceberg - 20,000 jobs equates to roughly 20 or more mines.²

The authors claim that Hayes spoiled the national strategy. Had he planned to make the announcement to the union as a whole, the union's executive would call a conference and a national ballot, we would lose the vote and the closures would sail through. But by the time of the announcement the troops were in the field, the pickets were already flying and Yorkshire was solid. The strike had started by other direct means. But who says Yorkshire, or any of the areas now gearing up for strike action to defend their own mines and those of other areas, would have waited for a conference and national ballot? Even without the existing Yorkshire ballot, branches would have held mass meetings and taken decisions to strike off their own bat. The authors are making far too much of a small and slightly amusing feature, which would make no long-term difference to the outcome.

Our picketing operations, according to MacGregor's own biography, were highly effective, especially in the first weeks. He goes crying to Maggie asking for American-style cops to get stuck in and break it up. Then he hits on the second front strategy - firstly getting British Steel/Corus and the ISTC steel union to abandon their agreement with the NUM and start using unlimited supplies of scab fuel. Next, he comes up with the strategy of putting a scab into every pit in Britain, not with the view to them actually producing any coal, but purely to force the pickets into their own back yards. "All you had to do was to make it known that you were going to

get men back at a particular pit and all the pickets from that particular area would disappear from Nottingham or the other areas to cope with it", said MacGregor (p91). But the book reveals that NCB chiefs were being fed constant polls and surveys of professional opinion takers testing the waters. They *knew* the strike was actually strong and holding.

So why did MacGregor decide to kick-start the strike in March by confirming the closure programme? It matters not whether Hayes jumped the gun. MacGregor himself intended to provoke a reaction and a strike ballot, which he thought would lose, but why at that time? The authors cannot answer that without contradicting a subsequent point they make about the overtime ban being ineffective. In fact, it is because it was thoroughly effective and draining away stocks that things had to be brought to a head. Thatcher was warned by Sir Walter Marshall from the CEBG that if the overtime ban continued through the summer months a short strike in the winter would rapidly shut the power stations and end generation.

The authors put the coal stocks at 48.7 million tonnes - roughly four months' production for the entire industry. Stocks would be exhausted and could not be replaced in sufficient quantity to keep the lights on. *That* is why the strike had to be kick-started prematurely. *We* did not pick the date to start the action - they did.

So could we have ignored the challenge, let the 20 mines close and keep the overtime ban in place until more favourable times before launching all-out strike action? Hardly: we would have arrived at the optimum period for action, but without any rationale for calling it, having allowed more than 20 mines to close already with the loss of 20,000 jobs.

But the authors do not believe any of this: "Unfortunately for the union, it [the overtime ban] was too late to dent significantly the stockpile which had been built up since November 1981" (p44). This throwaway conclusion, like much else in the book, is unsourced, undocumented and unsubstantiated.

Similarly, they write: "Many people, including most trade union leaders, thought Scargill had been outmanoeuvred into calling a strike in March, and he would have to struggle to sustain the strike all through the summer before it started to bite in the cold days of winter, when a lot of fuel would be needed" (p56). But this ignores their own evidence. Despite the fact that the NCB and MacGregor had chosen the optimum time from their point of view, all their advisers told them that victory was far from certain. Peter Gregson, head of the economic secretariat at the cabinet office and chair of MISC57, the secret cabinet committee established in 1981 to take on and defeat the miners, prepared a brief informing Thatcher and MacGregor stocks would last months or even weeks, not a year (p56).

On May 14 Peter Gregson, also of the department of energy, sent a blunt memo to Thatcher. The NCB could deliver only 1.85 million tonnes of coal to power stations. There would be huge costs to the taxpayer to keep the power stations going. Gregson's memo revealed that even if the strike was called off at the end of May, 350,000 tonnes of oil per week would have to be delivered until mid-September to keep the power stations open. If it ended in June, huge oil deliveries would be needed until December, while if it continued to July oil deliveries could not be reduced until March 1985.

He concluded: "This has serious implications for costs, bearing in mind that the net extra cost of burning oil rather than coal is £20 million per week and that during the recovery period, the CEBG would be buying oil *in addition* to buying coal, so that the relevant figure would be the gross cost of £50 million per week" (pp88-89).

So what was the reaction to these warnings? The authors tell us: "Like Gregson, MacGregor saw grounds for hope that the strike might be quite short. He told Peter Walker, the energy secretary, that the strike would be certain to be over by May when deductions of benefits hit miners and their families came into play" (p58). This was apparently revealed to the authors without any sort of shame by Walker himself. The government intended and planned in a cold, calculated way to punish the miners' wives and children in order to break the strike.

By the start of the strike, however, MacGregor was placing his faith in a new saviour, a breakaway movement in Nottingham: "If we could keep this vast and prosperous coalfield going, then I was convinced, however long it took, we could succeed" (p72). With this in mind, there would be unlimited police resources, no-holds-barred tactics, including the prevention of picketing, roadblocks, mass arrests, violence, intimidation and second fronts. Ultimately, the creation of an anti-union, yellow-dog organisation, built, funded and directed by Thatcher, MacGregor and the state counter-insurgency forces.

Scargill 'called the strike'

The myth that the strike was down to one man comes about for two reasons: the press wants to believe it true because it fits in with the idea that Scargill was a labour dictator who had some sort of magnetic hold over our minds; secondly, Arthur likes to play up his own importance in everything

the miners' strike

he was involved in.

On March 4 miners at Cortonwood branch voted to strike and instead of picketing, as they could easily have done, submitted a resolution to the area council calling for support: ie, for solidarity strike action against the threatened closures. If I recall correctly, there were three other strike resolutions on the agenda that day, including one against a pit merger, and one about a snap time dispute. We voted that we would recommend support for Cortonwood and leave the other issues on file.

The decision to strike, however, could only be taken by *the members*, regardless of the previous ballot decision. We had to seek endorsement that this issue was the one on which we would move. The book, quoting Ken Capstick, obviously speaking off the cuff, gives the impression that 'we' - ie, the delegates - off our own bat, and without mass endorsement of the membership, "embarked on a strike in Yorkshire". We embarked on the *process* which would lead to that action, but the decision was made and *could only be made* by the members themselves (p49).

On March 7 MacGregor met the NUM NEC and announced 20,000 job losses and over 20 pit closures. The executive proposed we strike from March 9 - effectively March 10, as that would be the first day branches could meet to endorse the action or vote against it. My own pit met on that day and 1,800 men turned up to have their say. We voted, as did all the other pits in Yorkshire, to strike until the closure programme was withdrawn (there were three votes against).

In fact, the NEC decision came directly as a result of Cortonwood's own resolution, whatever Arthur may have written on the back of a brass band programme at the time. Both the press and Arthur himself often think he was of far more importance than he actually was to many situations.

From March 12 every pit in Yorkshire was out, with the enthusiastic mass support and votes of the members. These were the facts. The book announces on the fly cover that Arthur Scargill called on the miners to strike on March 5 - ie, the day after Cortonwood struck. But this was an expression of his own opinion - it had no constitutional weight.

The Cortonwood branch (of which Arthur Scargill was not a member) passed a motion calling for Yorkshire to strike and presented it to the area on March 5 and the Cortonwood men lobbied the meeting. Arthur did not make any recommendations or speak at that crucial meeting because he was not in Yorkshire - as national president he did not attend area meetings. The decision to strike was taken at pitheads, by the members, over the weekend of March 10-11; Scargill was not present at any of them.

So, whatever he may or may not have said to the media, it was *not* Arthur Scargill who called the strike - he had no means of doing so. Miners do not get called out on strike except by their mates. The NEC met on March 8 and ruled that it would endorse, as official, strikes against closures in Scotland and Yorkshire which they presumed would result from the branch meetings over the following two days.

The authors raise questions about whether rule 41 - ie, endorsing area strikes as official - was appropriate: rule 43 stipulated that *national* strikes could only be called by a national ballot. What we had here was an area seeking the support of another area by picketing and requesting solidarity action. It could *de facto* become national. The NCB was attacking us area by area, so it was sensible, initially at least, to test

resistance area by area. The point for us was *fighting pit closures* - taking solidarity strike action to halt the government and NCB in its tracks. Did it matter how we achieved that goal?

By March 15 only 21 pits out of 174 were working.³ By contrast, the authors choose to report: "By Monday March 12 only half the 184,000 miners were on strike" (p53). Erm, but that was *the first day* of the strike in Yorkshire - 160,000 were out three days later!

The vexed question of the ballot is of course raised with gusto by the authors, but it is unclear whether they understand the process that led to the decision not to hold a ballot being endorsed as official NUM policy.

Every area had debated whether to have a ballot and every branch in Britain voted on the question. So just who "denied the miners the right to have a ballot"? Amazingly this question is not addressed. The authors think - because that is what every one of their colleagues thinks - that Arthur Scargill made that decision. He did not. A conference was convened in Sheffield to consider a rule change in a national ballot, with the proposal to drop the requirement for a 55% 'yes' vote for a national strike to a simple majority. This was to prepare the way for a national ballot on strike action. All subsequent polls - and at least one is quoted in this work - predicted that a ballot, if held, would be won.

The second issue considered in Sheffield was whether we should in fact *hold* a ballot. Twelve branches voted for an amendment to that effect - so there were 12 votes in favour, with the rest against. The Kent Area opposed holding any ballot and this was seconded by Yorkshire. The Kent resolution gained 69 votes, with 54 against. Scargill was in the chair and so did not speak for or against and of course did not vote.

These are the facts, *none* of which are reported in this so-called comprehensive and definitive book on the strike. Whether this decision was tactically sound is another issue, but it was not Arthur Scargill's decision to make. Like the strike itself, it was ours.

There is another related point. *Why* did the majority of miners reject a national ballot? Since the authors do not understand who it was who made the decision, they do not even ask the question. In retrospect we now know that the government, NCB and all their allies were terrified we would hold a ballot, because they knew we would have won it and derailed the elaborate scab-herding, strike-breaking operation they were putting into place. The evidence for this is also found in the book. MacGregor was warned: "There is just the possibility that Scargill will seek agreement at the conference for a snap ballot" (p107).

What is clear from *Marching to the front line*, although very little is made of it, is that one of Mac's responses to a successful strike ballot would be to plough on with the manufacture of the blackleg organisation, to permanently entrench the split and consolidate the scabs outside the NUM organisation, regardless of any ballot result, within what became the Union of Democratic Mineworkers. Walker, Thatcher and Lord Falconer agreed on this course and set about legal procedures with top lawyers to bring it about. What is not drawn out from this, though, is that the scab operation would continue, regardless of any national ballot, or its result. It skittles sideways all of the authors' central focus on the ballot question, but they seem unaware of the implications (p107).

So is this book of any value? Yes, it is. It exposes the extreme vulnerability of

the power stations and the power supply, the vulnerability of the NCB and the whole government shooting match. The facts it goes on to disclose flatly contradict earlier assertions on the inability of the miners to pull it off, on the ineffectiveness of the picketing, the overtime ban and the strike itself.

A dead loss?

What clearly demonstrates the big gaps in the authors' basic understanding of the strike and what actually occurred is their chapter on the key, strategic question of Orgreave. It is my view, and has been since the days of the battle itself, that Orgreave was a diversion set up by MacGregor with the help of British Steel/Corus and the outright enthusiastic collaboration of Bill Sirs, leader of the ISTC steel union. MacGregor goes on to admit as much in his own autobiography.

Not until Sirs and BSC decided to break the agreement on exempted supplies of union-sanctioned coke did Orgreave become an issue. They then set off with daily fleets of lorries to carry coke from Orgreave through the heart of strike-torn south Yorkshire and into the steel plant at Scunthorpe. That is what caused the mass picketing at Orgreave. Strangely this little fact is not mentioned - perhaps the authors do not know about it. The men from my pit picketed the railway bridge at Immingham and stopped all supplies of coke and iron ore from the docks to the steel works. In time, this led to two national dock strikes and a near surrender by Thatcher, now facing generalised strikes of transport, rail, shipping, docks and mines.

That potential was lost when the Immingham Transport and General Workers Union dockers broke the blacking and their own National Dock Labour Scheme by allowing scab minerals to be moved by non-dockers onto non-union scab lorries and into the steelworks. That led to a fleet of iron-clad coal lorries under mass police protection snaking through the coalfields twice a day.

That was what caused Arthur to direct all pickets to Orgreave. He did not have the authority to do that, by the way, but the pickets followed this instruction and - supported by the left, who thought Orgreave was Lourdes - they encouraged all pickets to ignore our appeal to picket the scab coalfields. That is how Orgreave happened - and it opened up a second front *against* our crucial picketing operation in Notts and the Midlands, and the even more crucial fight at the power stations. I will be exploring these subjects at length in my own book,⁴ but we will get no help in that direction from this one, because frankly the authors do not know what happened.

They cover Bill Sirs' decision to accept scab fuel and break the miners strike later, after the Orgreave chapter, as if Orgreave had nothing to do with steel and Sirs. This chronology thus makes nonsense of the actual events, even though the facts are actually in the book (p109). They demonstrate that the breaking of the agreements with the NUM to provide 'tick-over' fuel to the plants was a calculated move - providing steelworkers with scab fuel was a deliberate strategy to open up a second front against the strike with the complicity of Sirs, the ISTC, BSC and the government.

Three months into the strike and by chapter 5, the authors conclude there is already no way for the miners to win ... then the rest of the book contradicts this conclusion. For example, in July the ORC government-commissioned opinion poll found that eight out of ten miners were "certain" they would not go back to work within the next few weeks and that the

NCB would lose (p106). On July 18, in talks brokered by left Labour MP Stan Orme, between MacGregor and Scargill at the Rubens Hotel, the two sides came within a wisp - actually a word - of agreement.

The problem for all of us was Thatcher, who, dictating behind the scenes, turned hot and cold during negotiations and was torn between her need for a settlement and her desire to crush the miners. MacGregor, left to his own devices, actually conceded much of the NUM's case, until he was suddenly grabbed from behind by direct representatives of the cabinet. The talks had progressed to the stage where the only sticking point was around the term "beneficially developed": ie, that all coal reserves which could be beneficially developed would be mined. Scargill and the union obviously saw this as meaning 'economically' in terms of the NCB's profit and loss yardstick. In other words, uneconomic pits would close - the point of the strike.

The NUM tried to remove the word "beneficially" from the agreed text, but the NCB insisted that something which addressed the question of 'loss-making pits' would have to take its place - which made it clear what was meant by "beneficially developed". The authors, like many commentators before them, say that this was the nearest to victory the NUM could hope to get. They claim that an agreement that a pit would not be closed so long as reserves could be "beneficially developed" was a long way from the previous position that they would be closed if they were 'uneconomical'.

Frankly it would have represented a draw. It would have left us exactly where we were before the announcement of the closure list. It would have left the door open to future negotiations, pit by pit, area by area, but with the management in control of what "beneficially" meant to them, and the threat of renewed action from us if we failed to agree. Had we come this far, at such cost to simply go back to the pre-strike battle lines? Scargill thought it was not a commitment to ensure the survival and expansion of workable reserves.

The TUC, we are told, was now blaming Scargill for the failure of the talks. That this form of words would have allowed us to proclaim a victory. "Had Scargill been a proper negotiator, they said, he could have grabbed the chance before Thatcher had time to whip it away from him. The Engineer and Managers Association leader, John Lyons, who always maintained that Scargill had been offered the nearest thing to a victory that any trade union leader could ever expect, most forcibly expressed this view: "It was 95% of what they were after" (p114).

Did we want a draw in July, with the first seven months of the year already gone and autumn on the way? In August, the supplies of coal were becoming scarce throughout the UK and especially in Ulster. Rising electricity prices were threatening to hand the miners a PR victory we were looking for. "Contrary to public statements, [the strike] was biting already, even in high summer" (p119). It was clear Thatcher needed a settlement.

When we refused to settle, the government then decided to turn the heat up on Scargill as an individual, and let the press hounds loose. Press conferences were convened: "Ministers had launched a crusade to destroy Scargill and all he stood for." According to Walker, "This is not a mining dispute. It is a challenge to British democracy and hence the British people." The signal to the press barons was now to unleash a

deluge of black propaganda against Arthur and the pickets and the union in general (p119). Then followed Maggie's 'enemies within' speech - a declaration of war on the coal communities, in which members of the cabinet lined up to condemn the strike.

That this was orchestrated and fed to a compliant media is established in the book. The line was that Scargill was asking the impossible - no closures, no matter how expensive the unit of coal production. But neither the authors nor the government then actually considered that British coal had the lowest operating unit costs on average of any of the deep-mined coal industries in the world and, particularly, in Europe. British taxpayers subsidised through the European Economic Community all the coal-producing countries of Europe to help offset their high-cost production to allow it to come back to Britain, in order to displace the lower-cost British coal.

To say that has nothing to do with import controls or being anti-European. It was about recognising what game was being played here: the attack on the coal industry was a cover for a concerted attack on the NUM. The excuse was economics and high-cost coal production, but the fact was, this was a myth. British coal was always the cheapest deep-mined coal in the world. By this yardstick, there were *no* uneconomic pits as an overall operating average. Needless to say, the authors do not engage with this central point.

The authors are wrong, though, in thinking the power of the NUM was broken in 1985. In fact, Thatcher did not achieve *her* aims, though we certainly lost ours. In 1986, the NUM won a successful national ballot for industrial action by an overwhelming percentage. The power was given to the NEC to take the board on again, but they shit a brick, as we say, and dropped it. But Thatcher had not won - John Major had to come back again in 1992-93 with the 'final solution' to the problem of those miners. There is nothing of that, or the mass movement which rose to challenge it, in this book ●

David Douglass

Notes

1. On June 30 1925, in response to a mass strike and threatened solidarity action, the government enabled the mine employers to withdraw a wage reduction and a lengthening of hours through a subsidy. The state was not ready on the original Red Friday either, and the subsidy simply bought time while emergency powers were being put in place. When they were, the subsidy was withdrawn and the cuts re-enacted.
2. National Archives (Coal) 26/1410 reveals that Cortonwood should never have been included on the hit list which sparked the strike in Yorkshire, Scotland, Durham and Wales. But it did not have to be Cortonwood specifically to cause miners to walk out.
3. See B Wilson *Yorkshire's flying pickets in the 1984-85 miners' strike* Barnsley 2004.
4. *Ghost dancers*, the third part of my autobiographical trilogy *Stardust and coal dust*.

David Douglass is a former executive committee member of the Yorkshire area NUM, and Doncaster regional picket coordinator. He is a miners' historian and remains a member of the NUM after 44 years.

His three-part autobiographical trilogy *Stardust and coal dust* is published by Christie Books: *Wa mental* 2008, pp352, £9.95; *The wheel's still in spin* 2009, pp480, £12.95; *Ghost dancers - out soon*. Available from Central Books Ltd, 99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN; 0845 458 9911

The full version of this review can be read at: www.minersadvice.co.uk/reviews_%20marching_to_the_fault_line.htm

OUR HISTORY

One year of the miners' strike

This article by Jack Conrad was first published in *The Leninist* March 1985

The miners' strike is the longest mass strike in British history. And it has been as heroic as it has been long.

The miners have suffered seven deaths, countless injuries, and around 9,000 arrests. They have faced the newly organised national police force, which has launched cavalry charges and snatch squads against their picket lines. Their union has had its funds legally robbed by courts, which have also banned mass picketing. Even worse, because of sectionalism most in the important Notts coalfield refused to join the strike and now the Notts area National Union of Mineworkers has taken fateful steps towards forming a neo-Spencer Solidarnosc-type union.¹

But, while the miners have been blooded, they have not been cowed. They have fought back with hit squads, they have built barricades, they have defied the law, and they have raised huge amounts of money to sustain the strike. In this they have received sterling help from the mining communities as a whole, especially the women. What is more, tens of thousands of militants in the Miners' Support Committees have rallied to their aid, as have workers across the world, especially those in France and the Soviet Union.

Tragically, this solidarity has not been matched by the leaders of the Labour Party and the trade union movement. Not only have we seen Ramsay MacKinnock and Judas Willis² denounce miners' fully justified violence, but, despite TUC and Labour Party resolutions calling for action in support of the miners, the best that has been delivered has been tokenism; at worst downright scabbing.

Seeing that the trade union leaderships have no stomach to fight, Thatcher has been determined to press the offensive in order to smash the NUM as an effective union. Unfortunately, talk from the compromising majority on the NUM national executive committee about an 'honourable settlement' - that is, an honourable surrender - has only encouraged the Tories in demanding a humiliating surrender as a prelude to their general offensive against the living standards, rights and organisations of the rest of the working class.

True, many organisations and leaders of the working class have sought a victory for the miners. But against the full power of an aggressive and confident state the only way this can be achieved is the mobilisation of the workers in a strike wave of general strike proportions. This is something that many have refused to confront, preferring to keep talk about 'industrial solidarity' as vague as possible. Some, like Tony Benn, have even light-headedly said that the "miners cannot lose".

Of course, the fact is that the miners can lose. To suggest this can't happen is to desert reality and no playing with figures can change that. This does not mean that the miners have already lost, as the 'new realists' of the Socialist Workers Party claim: far from it. While well over 100,000 miners are on strike, victory can still be won - snatched from the jaws of defeat. But the key question is *how* to win.

It's no good just repeating the slogan for a general strike like *News Line*³ does every day: we all know this is what is needed: the real question is, how are we to get it? Some have suggested halfway house measures like a TUC-called 24-hour strike, or a recall TUC. But these calls are in reality utter diversions from the necessity of confronting the task of *organising* a general strike and offer not the slightest possibility of producing what is needed at the end of the day.



Women Against Pit Closures

The key to victory lies amongst the militant rank and file, not the fat-cat trade union leaders and their petty bourgeois alter egos in the SWP, *Militant, Socialist Action* and *Socialist Organiser*,⁴ their Mineworkers Defence Committee and BLOC.⁵ That is why we have from the very earliest stages of the miners' strike called for an organisation of the militant rank and file modelled on the National Minority Movement of the 1920s.

Central to this perspective are the militants in the NUM itself. They have shed their hero-worship attitude towards Scargill. Yes, they respect his intransigence, but they know he has got no winning strategy. However brilliant a tactician Scargill is, he is a prisoner - indeed, a part - of the trade union bureaucracy. The fact that he is tied by a thousand strings of ideology, social position and tradition to the Kinnocks, the Willises and the Basnetts⁶ means that he cannot demand and really fight for a general strike because to do so would mean to break with the TUC, the Labour Party and reformism. This is something Scargill shows no signs of being prepared to do.

Because of this, if the miners are to achieve total victory - and what else is acceptable after one year on strike? - then they must organise independently of their leadership. They must have the courage to form a Miners' Militant Minority.

No doubt many of the established full-time leaders of the NUM will oppose such a move; some will fight tooth and nail to prevent the rank and file organising themselves. They will have to be overcome like all tailists of the official structure. A Miners' Militant Minority must be established, wherever the opposition to it comes from.

A Miners' Militant Minority should fight around the following immediate broad programme:

- For a strike wave of general strike proportions in support of the miners, around particular sectional demands, and against the anti-trade union laws.
- For the transformation of the Miners' Support Committees into council of action-type bodies so that the struggle at a local level can be coordinated. This means they should consist of elected

and recallable delegates.

- For the linking of Militant Minorities across industries and for the linking of local Support Committees into a National Council of Action.

- For the formation of Workers' Defence Corps.

● For a democratisation of the NUM in particular and all trade unions in general. All officials to be elected and recallable and to receive no more than the average pay of the rank and file membership.

Militant miners must take this programme to other workers, especially those on the rails, in the docks, and in the metropolitan counties. They must also fight to win direct support from Miners' Support Committees in order to provide vital financial and logistical help. Already militant miners finding their officials blocking moves to picket power stations around London have taken matters into their own hands and with the full backing of Miners Support Committees, most notably the one in Camden (which provides £600 per week for the pickets), have organised picketing themselves.

This must now go much further. If a Miners' Militant Minority was established, it would receive the immediate support from a host of Support Committees. With a concerted propaganda offensive and patient explanation they could win the vast majority to back them. Part and parcel of this will be the political defeat of the gloom-and-doom mongers who at present paralyse many Support Committees and the winning of new layers in the workplaces to them.

Militant miners must grasp this nettle. If they wait for others to lead, victory will never be won. Those who have taken tentative steps, those who have organised themselves in scab areas like Notts, those who refuse to accept their leadership's compliance with court orders banning picketing must organise themselves as a Miners' Militant Minor-

ity. As soon as this is done they must turn outwards and rally the working class - above all the millions who are yearning for a fighting lead and itching to teach the Iron Lady⁷ a lesson she and her Tories will never forget.

While the strength of *The Leninist* is small we will place our paper at the disposal of those making any moves towards a Miners' Militant Minority ●

Notes

1. The scab-led Notts area of the NUM broke away to form the Union of Democratic Mineworkers in December 1984. This was a repeat of the action taken by the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association, whose president was George Spencer, at the time of the General Strike in 1926. Spencer's breakaway union was supported by the coalowners. Solidarnosc was the anti-communist Polish trade union formed in 1980. Its first president, Lech Walesa, was an admirer of Margaret Thatcher.
2. Former Labour left Neil Kinnock was leader of the party from 1983 to 1992; long-serving union bureaucrat Norman Willis was elected TUC general secretary in September 1984.
3. *News Line* was the daily colour newspaper of the Workers Revolutionary Party, probably the largest Trotskyist group in Britain until the early 1980s. Various nationalist and reactionary regimes and organisations in the Middle East backed the WRP - in return for services rendered - to the tune of well over £1 million. Despite the splintering of the WRP in 1985, *News Line* is still published.
4. *Socialist Organiser* was published until the 1990s as a Labour left newspaper by what is now the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.
5. The Broad Lefts Organising Committee (BLOC) was set up by the Militant Tendency (forerunner to today's Socialist Party in England and Wales) in 1981. The Mineworkers Defence Committee was formed by Socialist Organiser and others on the Labour left, including *London Labour Briefing*.
6. David Basnett was general secretary of the GMB union from 1973 to 1985.
7. Margaret Thatcher was first called the 'Iron Lady' by a Soviet newspaper in 1976.

Prepare for a general strike

A personal appeal issued by Jack Collins, secretary Kent Area NUM, to the Mineworkers' Defence Committee conference on February 9 1985, and distributed in leaflet form by supporters of *The Leninist*

Comrades and friends, first let me wish you every success with your conference and in any future solidarity actions you may organise in support of the miners.

The miners' strike is obviously the key battle facing the working class movement. On the outcome of this struggle depends not only the future of the National Union of Mineworkers, but possibly the very future of both legal and official trade unionism and other forms of democratic and progressive organisation in Britain.

The most recent underhanded manoeuvre is the attempt of the National Coal Board to string out the process of negotiations in the vain hope that the core of the striking miners will crack. They have clearly underestimated the resolve and fighting spirit of the striking miners and their families.

In contrast, the leadership of the TUC have clearly failed to respond in kind to the attacks of the Tories on the miners and the wider working class movement. The miners' strike has exposed the Willises, the Basnetts and

the Chapples of the movement as spineless fat cats with no guts to fight. The miners have never had any reluctance to call over the heads of such official leaders of the movement if these people fail to live up to their responsibilities as class fighters.

Food and money remain an important - indeed vital - component part of solidarity with the NUM and on behalf of miners everywhere I express my heartfelt thanks for this sterling work, without which we could not have physically survived these past 11 months. However, the whole question of industrial solidarity is becoming more and more important. There is a crying need for a cross-industry movement of those committed to *total physical support* for the miners. This total physical support movement should be committed to a class struggle programme and if necessary be organised independently of the official structures in much the same way as the National Minority Movement of the 1920s. Given this perspective, the Miners' Support Committees could begin a process

of transforming themselves along the lines of Council of Action-type bodies.

Although I have on frequent occasions called for preparations for a general strike to back the miners, we have to understand that the situation today is potentially very different to the 1926 debacle.

Today we see the possibility for social change. The miners point the way forward not only to the rest of the working class movement in the short term, but also to the struggle for a society where human need and not profit is the motive of our economy. But that relies above all on us seizing the opportunities that the struggle is presenting us with.

● Prepare for a general strike against pit closures and against the Tories' anti-trade union laws.

● Forge a fighting minority movement of all those committed to total physical support for the miners.

● Transform the miners' support committees along the lines of councils of action.

TECHNOLOGY

The pros and cons of internet power



Shhhhhh

One of the more curious features of the western media coverage of the recent events in Iran has been the prominence given to social networking websites.

In particular, Twitter - which allows users to easily distribute short and typically frivolous messages to those who sign up to receive them - was cited widely as a resource for updates on street protests and battles with security forces, as it can be easily updated from a mobile phone.

Also highlighted have been the risks involved - the use state security services have made of the same social networking sites to monitor dissidents, and their attempts to subvert access to this type of website, as well as the 'usual suspects' in the form of seditious material, gained widespread attention. Many readers will have seen a circular email and web-post urging them to change their regional details on Facebook and Twitter to Iran, also adjusting their time-zone settings, as a way of frustrating the Islamic Republic.

The internet-worship generated by the Iranian protests is nothing particularly new. Indeed, there is a long-running tradition of technological utopianism, which sees technology in one form or another as tending to make social hierarchy more difficult to sustain. Its traces (and more) are visible everywhere from Eurocommunism to *Star Trek*, and the generally lax standards of censorship and relative anonymity on the internet at the present time have rendered it particularly popular to trends in the anarchist movement, broadly defined.

In reality, however, it is a mistake to consider technological change - including the limited decentralisation of communication infrastructure made possible by the internet - as a socially neutral phenomenon, and dangerous to consider that it represents the pendulum of social change swinging towards plebeian or democratic forces. The question must be examined both from the 'top' - that is, in terms of changes in the structure of the media under recent capitalism - and from the 'bottom', in the effects it has on political organisation at the grassroots.

The capitalist media

It is probably profitable to begin with the recent coverage of Iran, which enthused over the possibilities opened up by social networking and the internet more generally.

Thus, an op-ed piece from the verbose and politically impoverished *Guardian* columnist, Timothy Garton Ash, came with the headline, "Twitter counts more than armoured in this new politics of people power" (June 17). The glorious advances in IT are for Ash a "new chapter in [the] history" of morally impeccable, non-violent, liberal-friendly popular protest. (Feel-good gibberish about 'people power' is, of course, perfectly amusing coming from a staunch defender of the European Union, in all its bureaucratic glory.)

In addition to this *subjective* enthusiasm, there are the *objective* dynamics of the capitalist media - there is something deeply ironic, indeed, about print journalists' Twitter titillation. After all, electronic media - particularly blogs and online news sources - are routinely blamed for the accelerating decline of traditional media outlets. The most obvious symptom of that decline is the clawing-back of budgets and sinking news values. The inability of many newspapers to commit to long-term investigative journalism renders this crystal-clear.

A consequence of all this is a certain *parasitism* of the traditional print and broadcast media on the new forms of communication; the prominence given to Twitter and Facebook (the leading social-networking brand) is partially a reflection of the shrinking capacity of traditional journalism to do its own footwork, employ Farsi-speaking writers, embed correspondents long-term in trouble spots and so on. This, of course, reinforces the trend by which it is generated.

That said, the *technical* shift has not resulted in an overall social shift. The fact remains that many millions of web users' first source for news is the BBC website, for example (indeed, the standard whine from private sector competitors about the BBC is that its website is so good that it infringes monopoly laws ...), and *The Guardian* draws much of its influence from an internationally read web edition, which makes up for its never huge paper circulation. The more things change, it seems, the more they stay the same - communications infrastructure remains dominated by the same institutions.

'Independent' media

On the other side of the question, there is the experience of media producers outside the major capitalist operations.

In this sense, the internet has given rise to great expansion in the sheer amount of material being produced, and of people producing it. This process accelerated with the advent of blogs and social networking, which by and large negate even the limited 'barrier to entry' of having to register a web domain. Those lefts not in groups - the 'flotsam and jetsam' - now interact with each other and with 'organised' comrades through a loose network of different blogs, which compete to an extent with the formal publications of the left groups.

In many respects, the whole thing is not qualitatively different from the 'old' media. Anyone with access to a library photocopier can put out a newsletter or a leaflet; it has not proved beyond the means of inner-city youth to set up their own (illicit) radio stations or put out pressings of records in small quantities; and so on.

There is another important element of continuity here. A pirate radio station can be shut down by the police. A rebellious leaflet can be seized and pulped - and you can be

banned from the library photocopier. The internet has an image that suggests it is different, more anarchic - but the fact is that every packet of data transmitted over it can be intercepted by an internet service provider (ISP); every blog stored on the Blogger site can be deleted at will by Google, and likewise for its competitors. The social-networking site MySpace has already effectively destroyed what was once a thriving community of radicals and socialists (easily the equal of the rather poisonous e-lists around) - Facebook and Twitter can do the same.

Iran is not the only authoritarian regime which has had cause to clamp down on electronic expression - China's inordinately complex attempts to purge its corner of the net of dissident material is infamous, and may even include 'denial of service' hacking attacks on the Marxist Internet Archive. Western companies such as Google have been happy to cooperate. For those British citizens unconcerned about their own prospects, we should recall the example of Samina Malik, who in 2007 was actually convicted of incitement under anti-terror laws for posting (admittedly dreadful) radical Islamist poetry on internet discussion forums (the conviction was later overturned on appeal).

The immense mass of heterogeneous material available, combined with the persistent survival of illicit means of dissemination (peer-to-peer distribution, most famously) and some confusion over national legal jurisdictions, gives the impression that the internet is a kind of anarchist 'pirate utopia'. The rather more mundane reality is simply that it is much as the media under capitalism ever were - only bigger and faster.

Of course, in almost any sphere of human activity, people employ the technical means available to them. There is nothing particularly surprising about the role the internet has had in the Iranian protests, which is not *qualitatively* different to the role it has in the quotidian political life of the left in Britain (probably 75% of my own expanding Facebook message inbox consists of circulars from Trot fronts, for example). The *fact* that the internet has both taken over and expanded many lines of communication in capitalist society makes it not only useful, but *necessary* for communists to use extensively. It also makes it inevitable that we will become as reliant on it as we have been on printing presses - indeed, this is already the case.

It also makes it necessary for radicals who value their web presence to be technically proficient and security-conscious. It is possible that the recent website problems our own organisation has faced are the work of the proverbial no-life bedroom hacker, and equally possible that the attacks are politically motivated (when the MySpace left groups still existed, for example, they faced far more determined hackers than rightwing equivalents). Both kinds of malicious activity are day-to-day threats, and we must be more prepared in the future to face them.

The Iranian masses - perhaps to the surprise of some condescending westerners - have proved themselves adept at improvising ways round the state clampdown, both high- and low-tech.

One of the purposes of permanent political organisations, however, is to be better prepared for this kind of thing going into such a political crisis - we should not forget the incredible infrastructure, the so-called 'red postal service', that delivered Social Democratic literature from exile to the doors of activists in Germany during Bismarck's anti-socialist laws, which kept the movement alive at a time of severe reaction and adversity.

Those techno-utopians who imagine the internet to have rendered such an eventuality impossible have more than a few nasty surprises to come ●

James Turley

What we fight for

■ Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars, occupations and sanctions, in particular those in which the British state is directly complicit. We constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. We oppose the slogan 'British jobs for British workers'. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and objectively anti-working class. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be readied to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.

■ Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

■ All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.

Become a
Communist Party
associate member

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Age _____

Email _____ Date _____

Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

weekly Worker

Capital demands public sector onslaught

Workers must not pay the price

Following the chaos that was the global financial meltdown, and the frantic state intervention that followed in order to shore up the 'free market' system - the god that betrayed them - there was, of course, much pious talk about learning from one's mistakes and never returning to the bad economic-financial habits of the past.

There was going to be a return to 'good, old-fashioned, boring banking'. Banks would rein in the cocaine-fuelled wiz kids and stop gambling away obscenely vast fortunes on all manner of highly speculative and hugely complex financial schemes. Strict curbs on the 'bonus culture'. No more 'reckless lending' and other such obvious nonsense.

Yet we all knew there was a big squeeze to come. By hook or by crook, the government would attempt to reduce the near mind-boggling debts it racked up as a result of its various Keynesian anti-slump measures - whether successful or not. Naturally, it was totally predictable who would end up eventually paying the price - and, oddly enough, it was not going to be the popularly reviled 'greedy bankers' and 'fat cats'. No, rather it was always going to be you and me.

Well, Steve Bundred, the thoroughly unelected chief executive of the audit commission - who has to survive on a salary of £246,000 a year - has well and truly let the cat out of the bag in the pages of *The Observer* ('We've had years of growth - so let's not be afraid of cuts', July 5). We should not forget that Bundred 'has form' - as chief executive of Camden council in the 1990s he slashed the budget by millions, sold off just about every asset he could lay his hands on, and within 18 months had got rid of some 3,000 workers.

So Bundred informs us that the "British problem" is that "we want Swedish levels of public service with US levels of tax". Of course, says Bundred, the politicians are running scared of the voters in the gradual run-up to a general election, so will not be "completely candid" about the true nature of the cuts to come. Hard to disagree on that one.

The "real choice", he writes, is about the "balance to be struck between tax rises and spending cuts", and where exactly they should fall. If we are to be realistic, Bundred continues, we must "dismiss the notion that spending on health and education will be protected" or should "be immune from cuts". After all, he remarks, there are "good reasons why they won't and shouldn't".

Which are? Firstly, thinks Bundred, at a time when inflation is likely to be somewhere between 2% and 3%, a "pain-free" way of reducing public spending would be to "freeze" public sector pay - or at the very least "impose severe pay restraint". According to him, this is only 'fair', seeing how "real wages" in the private sector are "still falling" - thus government ministers, if they are wise, will "correctly assume" that public sector workers "have done well over the past decade", and hence will "tolerate some modest real reduction in earnings".

Secondly, argues Bundred, both health and education have "experienced massive growth over the past decade" - and therefore have "faced less pressure than other parts of the public sector



Cuts

to provide value for money", which can only mean there are "efficiency savings available that will not affect service quality".

Cheerily, then, Bundred reminds us that "cuts are inevitable", urges us to refute the "myth" that "spending cuts will destroy the quality of public services" and to reject the "shroud wavers" who would have us believe that "grannies will die and children starve if spending is cut". And if we are to talk the hard, unsentimental language of pounds, shillings and pence - this is the boss of the audit commission talking, remember - he warns us to "expect a reduction" of £5 billion or more in real terms from public sector pay - which amounts to a "significant chunk" of the £50 billion or more that "may need to be found" through spending cuts and tax increases. But, Bundred concludes, that "still leaves much to be done".

Get the picture? Though, in some respects, we should almost thank him for his brutal frankness, no-one can now doubt what the future has in store for public sector and other workers - if the ruling class is allowed to get away with its plans.

Like a shot, the chancellor, Alistair Darling, moved to back Bundred's sentiments (although, predictably, he was rather less blunt and more vague and 'diplomatic'). Stating that public sector pay has got to "reflect prevailing conditions" - especially with regards to the current low level of inflation - Darling also ventured the view that pay has to be "fair to people who work for the public sector, just as we have to be fair to the private sector". Presumably, workers in both sectors should be eagerly looking forward to an equality of misery.

Of course, the likes of Steve Bundred are quite happy to peddle their own myths - or mendacious, self-serving lies. Writing in *The Guardian*, Alastair Hatcher and Ken Mulkearn of Incomes Data Services (IDS) highlighted the "urban myth" that all pay in the private sector is frozen, and thus public-sector pay should be frozen too in the interest of 'fairness'. In reality, they point out, "pay awards have continued in the private sector this year - about two-thirds have awarded increases, from 1% to 4% or more". Quite obviously, the reason why the private sector pay figures look

so "dramatically negative" is "almost entirely because of a large drop in bonus earnings in the financial sector" between February and March. That is, the "earnings growth in finance in February was -28.4% because of the drop in bonuses for high flyers". In reality, they argue, there is a wide spectrum, with pay freezes at one end and increases at the other (July 7).

In other words, the figures and statistics presented by those advocates of a total war on public sector workers are utterly skewed because they disingenuously include the huge - and no doubt very temporary - drop in bonuses amongst the 'whizz kids' and 'greedy bankers' during the specific and limited months of February and March. Talk about lies, damned lies and statistics ...

Of course, even if it were true that public sector workers have been doing so well, compared to their private sector brothers and sisters, no-one should be fooled by such appeals to 'fairness'.

It is the system of capital that caused the crisis, slump and huge debt, not those who produce capital's wealth. Nevertheless, it is worth looking at the pay reality. To get a balanced and true representation of private sector awards - as the IDS statistics show - all you have to do is look at the data for April 2009, but using non-seasonally adjusted figures and excluding the relatively large drop in City bonuses.

Hardly rocket, science is it? These reveal an earnings growth of 2.5% in the private sector and 3.3% in the public sector. In the private sector, the official figures show manufacturing - where most of the freezes are - at 1% and private services at 2.9%.

Yet the plight of public sector workers is much worse than suggested above. Teachers, civil servants and a range of others have not "done well" over the past 10 years. Below-inflation awards have been common, particularly over the last three or four years, and are frequently tied to attacks on workers' terms and conditions - not least their pensions.

Millions of workers are severely feeling the pinch. Last year the government imposed a 2% cap on public sector pay

rises, at a time when living costs were seriously escalating across the board and inflation was hovering around the 5% mark. An actual pay freeze would represent a serious reduction in the living standards of workers already struggling to make ends meet - it would be a full-frontal attack.

And worse is to come, have no fear. Ominously - as if the axe-wielding Bundred was not enough - *The Sunday Times* featured reports about how "secret 'doomsday' plans" for 20% cuts in public spending are currently being hatched by senior civil servants. According to the newspaper, the Whitehall mandarins have "begun creating detailed dossiers containing reductions in expenditure that are far deeper than the more modest savings being proposed" by both Labour and the Tories - the latter, using figures produced by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, says that there has to be public spending cuts of up to 10%.

Some of the proposals "likely" to be put forward by the high-level officials, claims *The Sunday Times*, include reductions in spending on London Underground, "renegotiating" Labour's "generous" pay deal for GPs and "savagely cuts in funding" for local authorities. Apparently, the "doomsday" documents will be colour-coded blue for a Conservative victory, red for Labour and yellow for a hung parliament with the Liberal Democrats holding the balance of power (July 5).

The writing is on the wall. We need to start seriously preparing and organising for the struggles to come - to defend public services and fight against the cutbacks. The very same disgraced bankers, wiz kids, bosses, unelected bureaucrats and myopic politicians who oversaw the economic crisis and collapse of financial institutions - are now uniting around calls to cut public spending and the wages of public sector workers. They want the workers to make the sacrifices, while, for all their fine words of regret, they carry on just as before - doing all in their power to defend a crisis-ridden system in terminal decline ●

Eddie Ford

Subscribe here

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £10 a year. Minimum £10 every 3 months ... but please pay more if you can. Your paper needs you!

Standing order

	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£25/€30	£50/€55	£200/€220
Europe	£30/€35	£60/€65	£230/€250
Rest of world	£60/€65	£120/€130	£250/€270
New UK subscribers offer:			
3 months for £5			

Name _____
 Address _____

 Postcode _____
 Email _____ Tel _____

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:
 Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

I enclose payment:

Sub £/€ _____
 Donation £/€ _____
 TOTAL £/€ _____
 Date _____

To _____ Bank plc, _____
 Branch Address _____
 _____ Postcode _____
 Re Account Name _____
 Sortcode _____ Account No _____
 Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 0744310, sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ _____ every month*/3 months* until further notice, commencing on _____.
 This replaces any previous order from this account. (* delete)
 Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____
 Date _____ Address _____